

Within the Chamber she Lies

Chapter 1: The experiment

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Explanations

Neo-Queen Serenity and her court lived a full and happy life until it is finally time for Lady Serenity to take the throne with Helios at her side. The day of the crowning, Chaos appears once more to shatter the queen's life.

Serenity retaliates with force, protecting the others with a powerful shield against their will. She fights Chaos with all she has, all along thinking about her days of freedom when she was Sailor Moon, when she could freely roam the city as she pleased.

With one last goodbye smile towards her king, daughter and senshi, she uses the Ginzuishou to banish Chaos once again but in the process Chaos unleashes a deadly attack and shatters the Crystal. The 2 most powerful beings in this universe disappeared without a trace this fateful day, leaving a once more peaceful world behind.

Of course, everyone is devastated but they are all now wondering; she was supposed to become Cosmos after her reign as Neo-Queen Serenity... What happened for her fate to change, and what will happen to her now? It even left Pluto baffled.

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This is how another story begins...

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1000 years before the Hogwarts we know, years even before its construction...

“Are you still entirely sure you want to do that? All the other subjects died and those experiments are all highly illegal. We could be banished from the wizarding world just for this...” said a blue eyed, blonde haired young wizard in his mid 20s.

He was wearing a red cloak trimmed with gold; the colors of his family. Normally he held himself with confidence but he was nervous these days and he talked to his friend with insecurity laced in his voice.

The other man scowled and continued on with the experience. “We’ve already talked about this and we were both okay with this. There’s no way I’m stopping now! I didn’t intentionally make myself a bad reputation to hear you try to coward your way out! You’re a bloody Gryffindor, Godric! Your family is known for its courageous acts, isn’t it? Now give me your arm so I can take the blood I need to get on with this.”

The equally young wizard who spoke had long dark hair and vivid green eyes. Coming from an equally powerful family, Salazar Slytherin was known for his wits and talents in potion making.

However, his popularity had taken a turn for the worst when rumors spread in the wizarding world that he was an adept of the Dark Arts. The real fact was; Salazar had intentionally helped to start this rumor by going into Knockturn Alley.

Why? Nobody except him and Godric knew and nobody would even think about him and Godric to be in the same league. To insure the safety of their experiment and the utmost privacy, he had decided it was for the best that he make himself a bad reputation to be left alone in Slytherin Manor where he and Godric were presently at.

Godric kept the press and publicity riveted on his person and Salazar was left alone, as simple as that. Now, if only their experiment was as simple...

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Months later

"I can't believe it worked!" chanted a very happy and festive Godric Gryffindor. Salazar looked pretty happy himself as he got an old bottle of Firewhisky from his storage room.

They both watched with contented expressions the growing infant in a glass container spelled to hold the precious growing life-form. Godric was elated and yet calm, watching this new little baby. "I can't believe this one actually survived! It's been 7 months; I think it's safe to say that there aren't going to be any more complications. Though I must admit that it would have been easier to just choose a woman to bear the baby."

Salazar shook his head negatively with conviction. "No way. We didn't work this hard for the baby to have foreign blood in the end!" he said, finishing his glass of Firewhisky.

Godric shrugged at his friend's outburst. "I can't believe I'm...WE'RE going to be fathers. I'm happy but...this child won't ever be able to go outside at the wizards' mercy. And it had to be a girl too! I always knew that girl had iron will; she's the proof, the only one who survived. Still, it's going to be hard for her" the red cloaked men finished sadly.

Salazar scoffed and slapped him on the back good-naturedly. "Bah! Nonsense! I know for a fact that you'll shower her with gifts and all; I'm rather afraid you'll make her a daddy's girl with a knack for trouble!" exclaimed the dark haired wizard with a smirk etched on his face.

Godric rolled his eyes but knew deep within him that Salazar was probably right. But the mood quickly sobered up as they both glanced again at their experiment, now their daughter. "I wonder what she'll look and be like..." the blonde man whispered softly.

Salazar's thoughts were slightly darker, though. "I wonder if she will be as powerful as we hope her to be...and if she'll be able to hold this kind of magic and responsibility. Both of our blood flows in her veins and no one else's; a more than pureblooded and incomparable mix between the Oh so different families of Gryffindor and Slytherin..."

Silence reigned in the dimly lit room the minute Salazar finished the dreaded sentence.

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Chapter 2: As time passes...

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"It's time to open the glass case...I'm so nervous!" Godric stammered happily yet apprehensively.

Slytherin nodded. "After you, my friend."

Godric glared at Salazar. "Chicken. But it will be my pleasure to be the 1st one to see her out of this container. Aperio!" With a quick flick of his wand and the murmured incantation, the glass jar opened and a thick liquid splashed on the floor.

Salazar quickly murmured "Extergeo", and the polished floor was neat again. They spent a long time just observing the sleeping baby girl.

"She doesn't look anything like us, doesn't she?" the blonde man observed and Salazar shrugged.

"She's still a baby so what did you expect? Blonde hair and blue eyes like you? She could look like me for all we know; she has both our blood within her and not an ounce of anything else. I still don't comprehend how she was able to survive such an onslaught of magic in her small body. If my calculations are correct, and they always are, we now have a daughter of Merlin's caliber. I hope we'll be able to control her." The Parselmouth finished anxiously.

Godric nodded fervently, determination written in his eyes. "Of course we will! We didn't create her to be a weapon! I admit at first I was only interested to know what would be the result between the mix of the Gryffindor and Slytherin bloodline untainted, but now she's so much more! I've grown fond of the little bundle; she's our daughter now and we'll be the ones to teach her everything we know. Isn't that right, little Serenity?" He cooed to the dozing baby.

Salazar was about to speak when the baby woke up and started to cry. The dark haired wizard hurriedly took the baby at first a little clumsily in his arms but he quickly got the hang of it. He sighed

frustratingly at Godric. "Well? Don't just stand there! Bring me a bottle of milk! And warm, not cold!" he snapped.

Godric rolled his eyes. "Yes mother" he said mockingly as he bowed down.

Salazar hissed at him in Parseltongue and Godric was out the door in seconds, howling in laughter. The baby gurgled happily in Salazar's arms. The blonde man didn't understand a word in Parseltongue, nobody could, but it had suspiciously sounded like "Pisssss Offf!"

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5 years later

5 years old little Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin was looking out the window at the outside world again. Salazar glanced at her out of the corner of his eyes and smiled calmly before turning his attention back to his work; the curse of the werewolves.

He and Godric were really happy about how she behaved; she was a really good kid, silent when needed and she never asked why she wasn't allowed to go outside alone. Somehow, Salazar was suspicious that her young mind knew the difference between her and normal children. Sometimes she acted wise and she often demonstrated a mysterious knowledge for things Godric and he knew little or nothing about.

The wards suddenly activated, bringing him out of his reverie, but no one was standing in front of the main gates. Salazar narrowed his eyes but he didn't have the time to draw his wand as little Serenity ran towards the kitchen, happily yelling "DADDY GODRIC!!!"

Salazar rolled his eyes in frustration as said Godric was heard laughing and the dark haired man walked in the kitchen. Godric was twirling the 5 years old around while laughing cheerfully. "You idiotic Gryffindor. How many times have I told you not to do that? I was about to draw my wand" Slytherin muttered and Godric shrugged him off.

"You know I did that on purpose to test her. Didn't you notice that she was able to tell it was me even if she couldn't see me?"

Salazar nodded. "She seems to have the ability to distinguish magic signatures. Remember when that stupid journalist tried to get in the house? She hid in her room so fast I was wondering what was up with her until I spotted the moron and kicked him out."

Godric laughed at this. "It's too bad I wasn't around to see it!"

Salazar scowled at him. "You must never be seeing here, Godric! It could arise suspicions and we could be arrested!" the green eyed man grounded out.

Godric raised an eyebrow at his friend's sudden ardor and put the child down. "Go play in the living room, Serena."

The little girl pouted cutely. "Will daddy Godric and papa Salazar come play with me?"

Godric chuckled and nodded. "We'll join you later sweetheart. First, daddy Godric has to tell papa Salazar some wonderfully good news. If you're nice I'll tell you too later, okay?"

Serena nodded enthusiastically and ran back to play with her toys in the living room. Godric watched her intently and sighed. "She still doesn't look anything like us, Salazar. I'm starting to get worried. Nobody in both our family has silver hair and her eyes...Well, she has our looks in her eyes at least; one blue and the other green...It's weird but at least we know that there's a little of us in her. And she's shown an interest in my magic wand lately. Do you think she'll be able to do magic before her 11th birthday? I know we already make her learn some wand movements and spells but I wonder if this new interest will grow even more or stabilize...and what about her wand? She doesn't have any and she'll have to get one someday! We can't just barge into Ollivander's shop and ask him a wand for a hybrid witch with both our blood running in her veins!" Godric said in a sudden panic.

Salazar cast a silencing spell on him to make the blonde man shut up. "Stop your ranting! You're giving me a headache! And we'll think

about the wand matter later. I had already planned on sampling a little bit of her blood to test it.”

Godric nodded, reassured for the moment. “Okay. Serena will understand, I’m sure. She’s very wise for her age.”

Salazar went to fetch himself a butterbeer and cast a cooling charm on it before he took a gulp. “Now, you said to Serenity that you had something important to tell me? Hurry up; she’s waiting for us to play with her.”

Godric’s eyes sparkled. “I found the other people we needed to make our project a reality.”

Salazar was now all ears and he sat down at the table beside Godric, the frown on his face turning into an interested expression. “Really? So who did you choose?”

“Well, they’re witches about the same age as us and they’re also from wealthy and powerful families so we won’t have any trouble for the financing. They are named Helga Hufflepuff and Rowena Ravenclaw and they were so thrilled about our idea that they didn’t think about asking any questions” Godric finished with a grin.

The green eyed man looked ecstatic and gulped the rest of his butterbeer in one go. “How many years will it take to built it? We’ll also need one heck of a good spellcaster for the protective shield we intent to put around it.”

Godric was about to say something when the sound of a vase falling and a scream shook the mansion. Both men threw their chairs away and ran to the living room yelling “SERENITY!”

They froze in their steps when they arrived at their destination and stared as the silver haired child looked back at them with wide eyes, not frightened anymore. An ancient looking vase was just floating above her lifted hands. She was looking at it with wonder filled eyes but she didn’t look so surprised; as if this was a normal day occurrence. She made the vase levitate to them and Godric took it with his mouth wide opened.

"I...think we'll have to teach her magic way before we anticipated" Godric stuttered.

Salazar shook off his baffled look before his friend and his eyes glimmered in anticipation. "Looks like we'll have to start her training tomorrow! I can't wait! And this solves the wand problem."

Little Serena jumped up and down in happiness. "Yay! Yay! I'll do magic like papa Salazar and daddy Godric! Will Serena have a wand like her daddies?"

Godric and Salazar sat on the couch and the excited girl jumped on the blonde man's lap. "No baby. You will learn a type of magic that has been forbidden for centuries. People say it's dark magic but we prefer the highly unusual words; wandless magic. And then you'll be the heir of the greatest school in the entire England territory; HOGWARTS!" Godric announced proudly while the child eyed him curiously. "What's Hogwarts daddy?"

Salazar took a piece of paper from his pocket and unfolded it on the table. Serenity bent down to look at the picture in awe. "This, little one, is a blueprint of Hogwarts. It's going to be a school where magical people like us will go without being afraid of being discovered by muggle people. We'll start its construction soon but it will be finished in a couple of years only. So now our priority will be to teach you how to use your magic." The dark haired man finished.

Serena nodded enthusiastically and continued to browse the paper. "Hogwarts..."

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Chapter 3: A myth is born

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6 years later

2 loud popping noises and a small flash of light later, 3 persons were standing on a huge grassy ground and marveling at the large castle that loomed over a brightly lit forest.

Salazar had made sure there wasn't anyone nearby by coming before the grand opening of the school, therefore it was in the beginning of July, and Serenity didn't need to hide. Their 11 years old daughter was standing near them because it had become a habit; she had never had any contact with another human being, after all.

After making sure that she only felt her fathers's magical signature, the silver haired girl laughed and ran around the ground, examining the edge of the beautiful forest. She could feel many animals living in there and she couldn't wait to take a look. All in all, she was thrilled to be finally able to get out of the house. "Fathers! Can we visit the castle now?"

The 2 men laughed and nodded, happy that their daughter liked the castle and its environment. After opening the huge doors, they got in and the 11 years old was awed to see such a huge and magnificent castle with grand staircases, just like in the fairytales her fathers read to her when she was younger. In fact, the castle was just like a gift to her, a big gift but a gift nonetheless.

She laughed and took off in a run, Salazar calling after her; "Serenity! Don't go too far or you'll get lost!" But only his echo answered him for the girl was already out of view.

Godric chuckled and slapped his friend's back friendly. "You're worrying too much! She's got Hogwarts's blueprints memorized! I would be more worried about myself getting lost than her. I'm sure she knows more shortcuts and hidden passageways than us even though we're the ones who designed it!"

Salazar didn't say anything after that; he merely blinked and went towards the dungeons where his private room was located. He didn't like the idea of having his chambers in the cold dungeons but he didn't really have any choice if he wanted to keep his nasty reputation.

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5 years later

16 years old Serenity was reading in her private room in Hogwarts, only too aware that hundreds of students were busying about in the castle. However, they were unaware of her existence, even more of the emplacement of her chambers.

She had learned everything she could from her fathers and she loved them both dearly. Hogwarts was a happy place and a safe one at that; Godric, Salazar, Rowena and Helga had put the protection spell around and in the castle themselves the day before the students would arrive, but what Helga and Rowena didn't know is that the 2 other founders had helped their daughter to sneak out of school that same night and add a 2nd layer of wandless magic on the 1st spell to strengthen and solidify it.

People were now unable to apparate on the grounds on in the castle but only Serenity seemed to have the ability to appear where people could not; a gift she had called "teleportation". She didn't know why she chose that word but it was familiar and made sense.

Serenity sighed and put the book aside; it was an Advanced Charms book but she had already read it twice. She went to the window (spelled to be invisible from the outside, of course) and gazed at the horizon.

She could see students flying around on their brooms above the small Quidditch pitch and she longed to get out there, to take the broom her fathers had given her for one of her birthdays and fly away in the clouds like she did with her daddy Godric. But alas, she was almost afraid of human contact, the 2 only people she had ever have a conversation with being the 2 men that had raised her.

“I really need to find something to do, a hobby or whatever...” she muttered before she decided to take a nap out of sheer boredom.

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Salazar Slytherin walked along the busy streets of Diagon Alley, the wizards present there not even sparing a glance at him. ‘That’s it, continue to ignore me on purpose, that’s what I want.’

He went into the Pet Shop and looked around in boredom. “Cat, cat, owl, mouse, cat, toad...” He muttered while walking into the alleys of the store. “Nothing here is truly interesting and fit for her. I don’t really have another choice, then.”

Salazar exited the shop and looked around before pulling his hood over his head. He tried not to bring any attention over himself, slipped into the shadows and into the worst place to go if you wanted to ruin your reputation; Knockturn Alley.

He hated to go there but lucky for him his imposing stature permitted him to pass anywhere without problem. He found the shop he was looking for and entered. It was dark and dusty inside and nobody was at the counter so he decided to browse the cages piled up against the black walls.

Some were covered and he could hear snarls and growls coming from them. This was no happy pet shop! The animals found here had been mostly illegally imported from another country but since an ordinary cat wouldn’t do...

He stopped in front of a small cage and examined its content, his eyes widening slightly from the shock of finding such a rare thing like this.

“I don’t think ya should keep your interest riveted on this egg, sir.”

Salazar jumped when a grumpy voice interrupted his thoughts. He turned to see the owner of the shop, a disheveled old man with an unfriendly face. Restraining his sudden envy to shudder under the old man’s piercing gaze, Salazar raked his nerves and sneered down at

him, playing the other man's game for now. "And why not? I thought they were extinct. It's a miracle to see one in those days."

The shop owner grumbled. "It's been here for a long time, this darned thing. Kept into a stasis, it is, if not it would hatch and start its rampage. Basilisks aren't the type of familiar you would want, believe me."

Salazar sniffed disdainfully at him. "This is for me to decide. I am ready to give you 1000 Galleons for this egg. Accept and be rid of it, or decline."

The owner's eyes nearly bulged when he heard how much Salazar was ready to give him and he retrieved the egg swiftly, making sure it would stay cold. He kept muttering under his breath as he strutted to his counter so Salazar could pay the huge fortune for the egg that was as big as his head, and apparently very heavy.

When they finished the transaction, the owner eyed him suspiciously. "And what might ye want to do with a Basilisk's egg, sir?"

Salazar eyed him coolly. "Not that this is any of your business, but actually it's not for me; it's a gift for someone dear to my heart. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a rather busy schedule to follow." He marched out of the shop and out of Knockturn Alley in big strides, the egg safely hidden into a bag.

"She's gonna love this!" he whispered to himself, smirking happily as he apparated away to Hogsmeade and walked the rest of the way to the castle on foot.

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The dark haired man made his way into the secret passageway that lead into his daughter's room and got in after muttering the password to the statue guarding the entry. Godric was already there, seated onto a bright red leather sofa. But there was no sign of Serenity.

"Godric? Where is she?" Salazar asked, a small panic well hidden in his eyes.

Godric motioned for him to keep it down. "Shhh, she's sleeping. Salazar, I think she's getting depressed a little. She nearly read all the books of the library! She must be so bored, alone all day in this room with nothing to do..." Godric said with pity in his voice.

Salazar smirked again. "Fear not, my friend. I already got something for her. In fact, I'll just wake her up and give it to her now!"

Godric raised an eyebrow; he had never seen Salazar act so giddy before, excepted when their daughter was "born".

The silver haired girl was indeed sleeping and she groaned when Salazar woke her up. "What? Did you need something, father?" she asked while rubbing her eyes.

Salazar didn't say anything and pressed a package into her hands while Godric looked on curiously. The blonde haired man wasn't prepared to see a Basilisk egg, however, and he expressed his surprise and apprehension. "Merlin Salazar! Are you crazy?! Do you even know what this is?! She can't possibly-" He got interrupted when Serena jumped in Salazar's arms with a smile that illuminated the room.

"Oh father! Thank you so much! Where did you get it? Basilisks are practically an extinct species!" She continued to praise him while lifting the cooling charm off the big egg with a wave of her hand and tucked it in her blankets.

Salazar smiled to himself and pulled Godric out of their daughter's bedroom; the blond man didn't look happy but before he could open his mouth, Salazar decided to explain his decision. "Before you bite my head off, just hear me okay? She needed a familiar so I got her one-"

But Godric used a silencing charm on the living room so Serena couldn't hear and he blew up. "A BASILISK! Salazar! What were you thinking about?! Did you go to Knockturn Alley again? Your reputation is bad enough as it is, and now you're bringing the egg of a Basilisk in a castle full of children! What if you've been followed?! Do you want to be killed for such an act?!" Godric sat down on the couch tiredly after his rant, trying to calm his wildly beating heart.

Salazar didn't look the least perturbed about the outburst (he had rather anticipated it), and he sat down in front of his seething friend calmly. "Godric, you know she is a Parselmouth, yes? Of course you do; you've seen her speak to the snakes in the gardens. I thought you were going to have a heart attack this day. Anyway, remember; she has our blood flowing through her veins and..."

Salazar stopped, remembering the day he had tested his daughter's blood. Indeed, she had their genes but something else also...so small a difference it could barely be noticed. Her blood was slightly glowing, humming with power. Flecks of silver so small it worried him for a second until he shrugged it off and concluded it was an after effect of her creation, of 2 different bloodlines mixed together.

Godric sighed tiredly, breaking Salazar's thoughts. "I know, I know. But why a Basilisk?" he whined. "I could've bought her a Hippogriff, you just had to ask! Basilisks don't stay small forever, you know!"

The dark haired man chuckled. "Yes, I know. But don't worry, I already know where we'll be able to put it when the time comes."

The argument ended and their daughter sauntered into the living room happily, seemingly unaware that the silencing spell put by Godric deactivated as soon as she walked through it.

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2 days later

Serena was pampering the egg –again- when it started to shake slightly. She yelped and resisted the urge to run out of her room to get her fathers who were currently teaching their classes. "Come on Serena! It's a snake, a dangerous one, but a snake nonetheless. You don't have to be scared of it."

She tried to calm her eagerness by remembering what the books 'Snakes of Dark' said about Basilisks; the babies stare only stunned if it felt endangered. It's the adult's eyes that were fatal.

The egg cracked and she ran to it, her face mere centimeters from it. A smile illuminated her face when the baby Basilisk hissed. *"Where am I?"*

Serena refrained from jumping in joy and answered back instead, almost surprising the newcomer. *"You are in Hogwartss, a school for wizards. My father bought you 2 dayss ago ass a gift for me; you were being held in a sstassis to keep you from hatching but I lifted the sspell and to care of you."*

If the Basilisk had eyebrows he would've lifted them. *"You sspeak ss snake, human? Then you are my new master and I sshall protect you."* It coiled around her arm and rested its head on her shoulder, falling asleep like this.

She simply petted its scales in amazement and watched it the rest of the afternoon. It was nearly a meter long, wait 'till it be grown!

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What was Godric's and Salazar's fright when they went to hug their daughter! They weren't prepared to hear a furious hissing and nearly got bitten by the snake coiled around her arm. *"Sstupid humans! Waking me and then trying to attack my master!"*

Salazar blinked when he heard the seething muttering and smirked. 'So, the egg has hatched already.'

Godric, however, stepped back when he only heard hissing. "What in Merlin's name?!" he yelped when he finally noticed the Basilisk. He didn't say anything and backed away slowly from it while his daughter and Salazar started to hiss at it. His daughter looked happy so he willed himself to accept the unusual familiar.

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2 weeks passed. The end of the school year was nearing. The students were happy that all the exams were nearly over but not only for this reason; they were nervous these days. Some kids had heard strange noises in one of the towers; hissing-like noises.

The Gryffindors had started to rebel against the Slytherins, saying that professor Salazar was turning dark and experimenting on an awful project in the tower. The Slytherins kept defending their potions professor; thus, the war against the 2 houses started.

The children were getting scared; so scared that a 7th year Hufflepuff reported his anxiety to his father, who was working in a branch of the ministry. If he had known that this simple act would completely destroy 3 people's lives, maybe he would've kept his mouth shut.

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Salazar was coming out of his classroom, having dismissed his 4th year Hufflepuff and Ravenclaw students a moment ago, when he spotted the minister and an impressive number of aurors opening the doors of the dungeon.

He quickly set foot in his classroom again and closed the door as silently as he could but he hadn't been fast enough, though, and the minister saw him closing the door. "STOP!"

The aurors brandished their wands and the minister pointed at the potions classroom door. "He went in there! Stop him! But remember to be careful, he could be dangerous!"

While they started to use the counter-spells to unlock the door, Salazar was already gone with all his research books and papers, using a hidden passageway that didn't figure on the Hogwarts map to hightail out of here.

Serena's eyes widened. 'I feel father's magic approaching...and it's distressed!' She searched around and yelped when the secret door in her living room opened, revealing a frantic looking Salazar.

"Serenity! Get your most important things and follow me! We have to get out of your room and seal it! HURRY!"

Serenity didn't dare question him and obeyed even though she was confused. Salazar himself had a few things in his possession; a bunch of rolled parchments and a medium-sized trunk. As soon as she took out 1 last thing, Salazar gripped her hand and pulled her out

of her hidden rooms hurriedly, quickly casting a spell over his shoulder to seal the statue that guarded the entrance.

“But father! It’s broad daylight! What if students see me?” she whispered nervously while they strolled down the corridors at a rapid pace.

“I don’t care at this point. You have to hide, that’s all that matters” Salazar muttered. Luckily, there were no stray students and the 2nd passageway entry came into view; the portrait of a known Quidditch player of this time. But as he pushed her behind the portrait, 2 wandering aurors spotted him and tried to throw a stunning charm on him.

They missed as Salazar dodged and he closed the door behind him. “Serenity, block it.” Salazar said before he started to walk again.

The silver haired girl eyed the door and murmured a quick ‘Obsero’ before she continued to follow her father, her Basilisk draped over her shoulders and hissing gently at her to calm her down.

On the other side, the 2 aurors had already called forth reinforcement and the others arrived with the minister. “Where is he?”

“He used another passageway. It’s this portrait but we haven’t been able to open it! Whatever magic was used on this door it won’t open anymore! And I swear I saw him push something in front of him; it just kept hissing! It could be a Dark creature! A monster!” the 1st auror finished frantically.

The minister growled. “That’s it! I can’t allow this to go on! He’s unleashed a monster into a school for children and he’s getting more powerful, more uncontrollable!” He took out the map of Hogwarts and grinned darkly when this passageway was marked on the map, unlike the other one. “It leads to some girl’s lavatory. Damn! It’s at the other side of the castle! We must hurry and stop him! Quickly now!”

The aurors all nodded except one, who stood away and followed them silently, his eyes hard and serious; the glint in them, like a man that has no boundaries, was the most scaring, though.

Nobody was around the girl's lavatory when they opened the door in one of the stalls. Not convenient for a secret door to be placed but this place was rarely used. Without further ado, he was in front of the sink and hissing at it. *"Open!"*

Everything moved until a tunnel appeared on the floor. Salazar let himself slip inside and Serena followed, hissing *"Close"* behind her. They stumbled on a sealed round metal door with a snake engraved on it and repeated the process until the huge statue of Salazar's grandfather, with his mean looks and long beard, came into view.

Serena was in near hysterics by now, not knowing what to do. She was shaking and tears started to form in her eyes but Salazar gripped her shoulders and shook her to make her look at him. *"Serenity! Listen to me! We can't let them discover you or else they'll kill you!"*

Serena opened her mouth to protest. *"But father! What about you and daddy?!"*

Salazar shook his head and threw a spell on a nearby wall; it looked like an ordinary wall until it opened with a loud creak to reveal another hidden room, with a bed and a variety of furniture. *"Go sit on the bed sweetie, but 1st give me your Basilisk, will you?"*

She was about to protest again but the look in his eyes made her close her mouth with a glum look, extending her arm for the large and still growing snake to slither to him. *"Good girl, now go and wait for me, I won't be long."*

She nodded and turned around, leaving him with the curious snake.

"Listen to me very carefully. Go in the mouth of the statue and protect her; protect your mistress, my daughter. Listen only to those who have the 'talent', nobody else. I know you're not my familiar, but just this once-" he stopped his pleading and stared as the Basilisk seemed to nod and slithered up the statue and in the opened mouth.

"Your request shall be granted. I will serve Slytherin forever. Farewell, human." That said, the mouth closed and Salazar shook his head. *"I could swear there was pity and melancholy in its voice..."* But

he had more interesting matters and went back to his awaiting daughter.

He put his trunk and parchment away with her other stuff in a closet and turned to her. "Again, baby. Seal it again" he merely said.

She blinked back tears and complied. "Obsero."

With the closet locked, he sighed and hugged his daughter tightly, a hug she returned whole heartedly. She wasn't stupid, he didn't need to explain anything; she knew he had to make her go to sleep and he might not come back. "I love you father, both you and daddy Godric. I'm not holding any grudge against you, if you're wondering. I love the way how you took care of me and teach me everything you knew. I'm proud to be your daughter!" she cried in his chest.

Salazar's worries lifted and he stroked her long braided mass of silver hair. "My baby, I'll miss you! Godric will be devastated but we only want you to live on. He would've done the same thing. Now lie down baby, you know what's coming." The dark haired man said sadly, not bothering to hide his tears. He quickly wiped them away determinedly with the back of his hand and muttered the long and complicated spell that was going to make her go to sleep, almost like freezing time itself; a spell Salazar and Godric had created just in case something like this would come to happen.

She let her magic walls crumble to allow the spell to hit her, all the while narrowing her eyes in a vengeful thought. 'Those ministry dogs destroyed my life. I won't ever trust one, never!'

With one last peaceful look at her father Salazar, her eyes closed and Salazar quickly closed the door and put a simple locking charm on it; nobody knew the entry of the Chamber of Secrets and even if they knew they would have to speak Parseltongue to get through and face a Basilisk.

"Farewell my daughter. We'll live on inside you forever. I have a feeling I won't live through this but if I die, I will so I peace."

He ran out of the humid tunnel and exited the pace, closing the main entry in the lavatory just in time. Aurors burst into the place and

brandished their wands at him. "Don't move!" they yelled angrily, puffing from the run through the castle.

Salazar stiffened but stayed as he was; leaning on a sink. The minister entered not minutes later with Helga, Rowena and Godric in tow. "Alright Slytherin!" The minister snapped viciously, "Where is it, the monster that was with you?"

Helga and Rowena looked frightened and they sputtered in shock while the man continued to list the things Salazar was accused of doing; amongst them was endangering children in a school, using Dark magic, going to Knockturn Alley... But the true reason, though they didn't mention it, was that they were starting to get scared of him.

Godric wisely kept silent but he was screaming internally, his heart pounding as if it wanted to get out of his ribcage. 'I won't be able to see her if something happens to him, but I can't risk her safety!' He was caught in an internal dilemma but Salazar's answer made him both freeze and be proud, knowing that she would be safe. It was all that mattered, after all.

Salazar started to laugh darkly, mockingly, at the minister and the scowling aurors, yet one had yet to draw his wand. The minister took a step backwards at the menacing laugh. 'So you want me to be bad, huh? Then I'll play your game! I'll give them a reason to be worried!' he thought, before speaking up with a deep voice that seemed to boom in the lavatory.

"You fools! If you think you'll be able to find –it-, then go right ahead! It can be anywhere in the castle, the Chamber of Secrets!" Salazar started to laugh again, as if he was demented. His gaze locked with Godric's for a short moment but the blonde man understood and bowed his head to block the sounds in the room, his eyes closing also; he didn't want this to be the last image he would see of his friend.

When the aurors started to tell him they would make him drink a large dose of the newly invented Veritaserum to make him talk, Salazar snapped and took out his wand swiftly, charging at them with a cry. He didn't have the time to say a curse, though, as a green light enveloped him.

His eyes closed and he fell on the floor, dead from the only spell that would be feared through all the times; Avada Kedavra.

All eyes turned towards the silent man that was always following the aurors; his wand was drawn and pointed where Salazar previously stood. He was an Unspeakable.

Helga and Rowena hugged each other and started to wail. Godric merely turned his back at the dead body. 'You died to save a life. You led a life full of lies and deceit, being despised by everyone but 2 people. You died honorably and even though it will be with mean reasons, your name will live on through the ages. May you rest in peace and watch over Hogwarts...and our daughter. Goodbye my old friend.'

Silently, he exited the room and pushed some nosy students away, retrieving house points on his way.

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They spent years searching the castle to find that "Chamber of Secrets", yes they did. But years after the death of the remaining 3 founders of Hogwarts, they abandoned all hopes and called it a hoax.

The story became a myth quickly forgotten except for a few selected people who passed the information down in their families; one of these families were the Malfoys, purebloods on Slytherin's side. One other... were the Dumbledores.

It is even said that Godric left an heir behind, and that the brother of Salazar Slytherin continued the family line, creating mudblood haters and Dark magic adepts; everything Salazar wasn't.

Another story ends, making way for a new beginning...

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Chapter 4: Inside a dark mind

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Once again, number 4 Privet Drive was the victim of strange apparitions when the “mentally unstable” nephew of Petunia Dursley came back from his “school of rehabilitation”.

Strange people were seen to roam around number 4 but it was never the same person 2 times in a row.

Vernon Dursley had been scared shitless by Mad-Eye Moody but as Harry knew, he would get it when he came back home. “Home”. This word rolled bitterly in Harry’s mouth once he ran to his bedroom, Vernon’s yells and Dudley’s teasing echoing in the house.

He closed the door with a bang and almost took his wand out to cast a locking charm on it until he remembered he couldn’t use magic outside the school. He fell on his bed stomach first and stopped moving.

One would’ve thought him as dead but they would quickly change their minds if they knew what was going through his head at the moment. ‘Umbridge is gone but there are no reasons to rejoice! Sirius is...Sirius is...’ Harry closed his eyes tightly and fought the tears that threatened to drop, incapable to finish his thought.

“This is all Dumbledore’s fault! This is Snape’s fault! This is Lupin’s fault, for not letting me bring Sirius out of there!” he sneered, hatred lacing through his voice. Yet, the one he hated the most, except Dumbledore, was himself.

“I’m unable to protect the ones around me. They’re always thinking about sacrificing their lives so that Harry-Bloody-Potter can live! I never asked for this! All I wanted was to be normal! I should just die so I could be in peace! I hate them!” He was in near hysterics, almost yelling at the top of his lungs.

His door opened forcefully and Harry turned to see Dudley with his fist where the door once stood. The beefy boy gripped Harry’s

forearm viciously and forced the wizard out of the bedroom even though Harry was trying to force his way out of the bruising hold.

“Oh! You’re in for it now, freak! My father didn’t appreciate to be threatened by those freaky friends of yours at the train station.” He almost threw Harry down the staircase but the dark haired boy found his equilibrium at the last second, making Dudley scowl.

Once he came into view, Petunia went in another room without a backward glance and Vernon cracked his knuckles with a glare directed straight at the cursed boy. Harry knew what was coming but instead of wincing like he would have done last year, his face slackened and he looked back at his uncle emotionlessly.

It only served to make Vernon madder and he backhanded Harry on the cheek, making the boy stumble backwards by the force of the blow. “YOU FREAK! I’m sure you’ve enjoyed seeing me get humiliated by your freaky little friends!” the grown man bellowed.

Harry felt his cheek throb momentarily until he got accustomed to it, almost welcoming it; it squelched the ache in his heart. “They’re not my friends” was Harry’s dull answer. The green shine in his eyes darkened.

Vernon scowled. “Of course not! I bet they’re only faking it! After all, who would want a troublemaker and a murdered like you as a friend? You even killed that Godfather of yours! Murderer blood runs in the family, doesn’t it?” Vernon said sadistically.

Harry didn’t answer that, but when Dudley mocked Sirius even more... “He got what he deserved, dad. Black killed so many people it was about time someone did something to get rid of the trash. Personally, I could kiss the person who finished the job” Dudley finished proudly, a taunting smirk in Harry’s direction.

The green eyed boy’s eyes snapped open and he charged at Dudley with murder written in his eyes and landed one good hit at Dudley’s stomach. “DON’T SAY THAT EVER AGAIN! SIRIUS WAS A GOOD MAN! WAY BETTER THAN ANY OF YOU!” Harry screamed, and tried to hit Dudley again, but without success; Dudley was the captain of his fighting team, after all.

The beefy boy retaliated with a strong blow in Harry's stomach and this time Harry fell on the floor. Vernon gave a cry of rage and took Harry by his arm and dragged him towards the cupboard under the stairs. "YOU FREAK! I'LL MAKE YOU LEARN SOME MANNERS, IF NOBODY ELSE WILL! I CAN'T WAIT TO HAVE YOU OUT OF MY HOUSE FOREVER! NOBODY WILL EVER LOVE YOU! YOUR FRIENDS WILL TIRE OF YOU ONCE THEY SEE HOW PATHETIC YOU ARE AND YOU'LL BE ALL ALONE!"

Vernon threw the smaller boy in the cupboard and locked it. "You'll stay there until the end of the summer! You'll write your bloody letters each 3 days so –they- won't visit and I don't want to hear one word coming from you! Cursed boy!" The grumbling man returned to his son who was faking a stomachache where Harry had hit him to get some attention.

Meanwhile, Hedwig had been lucky; Harry had set her free the minute he had set foot in the bedroom upstairs and he had put his wand and cloak under the floorboard. But Harry wasn't worried about those anymore.

In the small and dark space, the boy's blank stare gazed at nothing in particular. His heart was cold, his stomach hurt like hell and his scar was about to burst. But he never winced nor moved. 'I'm alone. They don't care about me. All they care about is their image. Curse Ron because he has a family, curse Hermione because she has knowledge, curse Snape because he hates me for nothing and because he refused to help me learn Occlumency, curse Lupin because he didn't let me die with Sirius and curse Dumbledore for making me stay here even though I'm sure he knows what's going on, and curse him again because of all the lies he fed me, of all the deceptions he caused. But most of all, curse Voldemort for not having finished me off when he had the chance. I hate them all.' He kept repeating this as if it was his mantra, again and again, his voice dull and uncaring.

If Voldemort would've heard him, he would've laughed in glee, as a once pure mind darkened in hate and despair. Sirius's death had been too much and Harry had been pushed to the edge. The hero of

the Wizarding world was dying inside, and it was too late to do anything.

If Hogwarts knew what was coming the next school year, it would've paid for a miracle, and not for the broken mind, body and spirit of Harry Potter.

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Chapter 5: The return of the viper

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A very silent and stoic Harry Potter paid the taxi driver before going to King's Cross. The boy narrowed his eyes when he spotted some members of the Order waiting for him near the train and he quickly put his cloak on, careful about not being seen.

He passed beside Tonks and Mundungus Fletcher, alias "Dung", and quickly got into a compartment in the Hogwarts Express. Harry kept his cloak on and only ignored the 1st years who took the same compartment as him, sneering when they started to talk animatedly to each other about friends, family... and Harry Potter.

Not once during the trip did Hermione or Ron come to search for him in the compartments. Harry's eyes darkened. 'They must be kept so busy with their jobs as Prefects! Well, I'll just be left alone more easily; people who stay away from me won't be hurt, and if they're not my friends they can't betray me. But if I don't act normally Dumbledore will be on my case all year long...'

He was caught in a dilemma but decided to just wait and see what kind of acting he would be forced to do...and he was a very good actor.

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After a couple of hours, the Hogwarts Express came to a stop and the students started to get off. Harry didn't wait for the others and ran to the 1st carriage before anyone else, bypassing Hagrid all together and not even sparing a glance at Lupin and all the other aurors. 'That's it, try to look for me. You're probably all worried of having lost your Boy-Who-Lived.'

He caressed the Thestral and got into the carriage, almost laughing when the Thestral started to trot towards Hogwarts without waiting for the other students who wanted to get in.

When he arrived, he hid in a corridor because Snape came strolling in with a scowl 10 times worse than the usual. The potions master made a bee-line for the Great Hall and Harry got out of the shadow and took his cloak off, but stayed in a corner to observe the arriving students.

His eyes hardened when Hermione and Ron got in with their trolley of students and friends, laughing and telling jokes. Obviously, they hadn't even thought about him.

Once he was sure they were seated in the Great Hall, he got in himself and didn't flinch as half the students stopped talking and pointed at him under the table as if he was part of an exhibition.

He pretended not to see Hermione and Ron waving at him madly and sat down at the end of the Gryffindor table, right next to the door. His blank gaze and tired looks must've startled a couple of the older students because no one came near him; probably because of last year when he had that episode in the bedroom that had caused him to be sick as hell. News always traveled fast in Hogwarts so now probably all the older students, at least the Gryffindors, knew about Harry's nightmares.

He could faintly hear Lupin talking from his place at the end of the table and Harry was 100% sure the werewolf was speaking to Dumbledore and pointing at him. While Harry wondered why Lupin was back here even when people knew he was a werewolf and why so many aurors were present, he didn't dwell on it and preferred to lean his head on his arms on the table to rest as the scared 1st years started to enter.

As usual, the hat started to sing but this time the song was really weird and foreboding. It sang about the houses having to unite again, but mainly focused on Gryffindor and Slytherin.

With his face hidden in his arms, Harry snorted. 'Gryffindor and Slytherin... Those 2 houses will never like each other so why even bother? Nothing good will ever come out of this union anyway.'

If only he knew...

The 1st years started to get sorted and soon the 1st new Gryffindor was named, making Harry lift his head slightly. After the usual round of applause, the 11 years old made his way cockily to the end of the table where there were some places left.

The young boy smirked and probably tried to impress the older black haired boy seated alone at the end of the bench but when he turned to look at him, the 1st year froze in awe. He had the scar! It was Harry Potter! He was in front of Harry Potter!

He opened his mouth to say something but the blank stare Harry Potter directed at him and all who wanted to get nearer quickly made them back away and sit elsewhere. Harry resisted the urge to smirk and opted to turn his head in indifference towards the wall in front of him. '1st years are so easily frightened' he mused.

From his place at the high table, Dumbledore frowned slightly at Harry Potter's display of animosity. Remus and Moody had also noticed but they couldn't do anything about it now since the sorting wasn't finished. They just couldn't show favor to only one student in particular and anyway, they had bigger worries now.

The sorting soon ended and Dumbledore got up, the students immediately shutting up. He had on a grave look and the usual twinkle in his eyes was gone. The teachers didn't look happy either, for even the usually joyous professor Flitwick looked perturbed and discontent.

"Everyone, welcome to another year at Hogwarts. I will remind everyone that the forbidden forest is forbidden to all, that you all must stay away from the Whomping Willow and that you must not bother our caretaker Mr. Filch. Now everyone must wonder why so many aurors are present, as well as Mr. Lupin; the menace of the Dark Lord is getting more dangerous. As such, the minister has openly offered his help and allowed some of his aurors to protect us. Mr. Remus Lupin, although not an auror but a werewolf, will not be of any danger and will help for he knows the school more than the aurors themselves. The minister also ordered the return of...someone else and..." The headmaster looked uneasy for a minute and really angry.

The person hidden in the shadows behind him sighed loudly and arrogantly and stepped forward before the old man could continue. "Oh come on, Dumbledore! Why must you take an eternity to present me? Almost everyone knows me already!" came the obnoxious voice of none other than a smirking Dolores Umbridge, looking as bitchy and infuriating as she did last year.

The damned "High Inquisitor" leered in glee when most of the students groaned and whimpered at her sight. Ron and Hermione looked at each other and Ron made a hangman motion and pointed towards Umbridge, which earned him a glare from said woman and laughter from his friends.

Hermione looked at Harry but she wasn't the only one; Umbridge had also located the green eyed boy at the end of the table and she looked positively jubilant. She probably had new ideas of detentions reserved for him.

The moment Harry saw her come out of the shadow he sneered in disgust and treason and turned around. He was screaming internally and fingering his hand; the words "I will not tell lies" were still engraved on it. 'Those fools! How could they believe her side of the story at the ministry and make her come back here! Don't they know what she did to me?! Or they do know and they don't care! I can't take much more of this!'

Harry closed his eyes tightly and fought against the will to smash the table in front of him. He knew that Umbridge was looking right at him and he opened his eyes only when the food appeared on the table. He looked at the food and then at the utensils beside his plate, the knife in particular.

Nothing in his life looked so enticing right now than this simple knife, and he wished he could just end it here and there. 'I wonder what they would say...' He had entered some sort of trance, just staring at the knife, until he felt a slap on his back.

"Hey mate! Why didn't you sit with us earlier?" Ron said with a wide grin, his hair as red as ever. Hermione was beside him and looking at the redhead in sideways glances, making Harry think that there was something going on between those 2.

Ron sat beside him and Hermione in front of Ron, and both started to eat. "I can't believe they allowed that viper to come back! We'll show her, won't we Harry?" Ron said with a playful smirk. But he quickly lost the playful attitude when Harry looked back at him emptily, almost coldly. "We won't show anyone anything. Goodnight."

The green eyed boy eyed the 2 Prefects dully one more time, almost scaring them, and turned around to leave the Great Hall. "Why Harry! I don't think it's time to go to your Common Room yet!" Dolores Umbridge called out but it ended as a screech more than an attempt to sound nice.

Harry turned around to look at her; the old bat had managed to catch the attention of every student and now they were all looking at him. Curse the woman! "I couldn't care less about what you think, Umbridge. For all I care you can get lost in the Forbidden Forest again." Harry said this so coldly and forwardly that some students gasped, Ron and Hermione included, and the teachers didn't know what to say.

Even if they did, Umbridge would've beaten them to it. The woman screeched so loud in anger and indignation that Harry forced the urge to use his wand on her with a 'Silencio'.

"YOU IMPUDENT LITTLE BOY! How dare you talk to me like that! 50 points off Gryffindor and it looks like you'll have detention with me again!" She smirked sadistically when she thought she had cornered the boy but Harry merely sneered back, ready to play her game anytime.

"I don't care what you think or say anymore and you can shove your detention up your ass. Goodnight Oh High Inquisitor!" he said mockingly and before anyone, Snape included, could yell at him, Harry was already out of the Great Hall and up the staircase.

The green eyed boy knew that he would get it tomorrow and be the center of attention again but this time, they could yell at him, beat him, suspend him...anything they liked, really, because he would not flinch anymore like he would've done the last years and he really had no one who would care what would happen to him if he got sacked from school.

He was not going to be manipulated anymore. They wanted a hero, they wanted someone who had a head on his shoulders and some sense too while we're at it, well they had him. Except that this boy wasn't going to be pushed around, not by Dumbledore and certainly not by Umbridge.

Harry had been pushed too much, and this hero was slowly turning his back onto the Wizarding world. His scar throbbed more than ever but Harry welcomed it; it made him feel, feel that at least someone was constantly thinking about him. Even if it was Voldemort.

'They can all go to Hell. I'm all alone, nobody understands what I'm going through and I'll have to act in consequence if I want to stay alive.' He thought emptily.

The beautiful golden aura around him was diminishing along with his faith in everything he ever believed in, or everything Hogwarts made him believe. Green was slowly starting to swirl around him, fighting the gold. Harry Potter was turning darker and darker by the day... And he knew and didn't care anymore.

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Umbridge was still screaming when Harry exited the Hall and the place was in a total ruckus, the students all chatting and talking together about the latest event.

The aurors were all talking in hush tones, McGonagall's mouth had yet to detach itself from the floor, Snape was sneering as usual and Umbridge was literally screeching at Dumbledore, telling him to sack Harry immediately. "I WON'T STAND FOR THIS DUMBLEDORE! THAT BOY NEEDS TO BE TAUGHT A LESSON! HE NEEDS TO HAVE A YEAR OF DETENTIONS WITH ME! IF YOU DON'T DO SOMETHING ABOUT HIM MERLIN I'LL-"

"SILENCE!"

Everyone sat down swiftly and shut up; the headmaster was frowning and fingering his head because of his developing migraine. Once he plucked a Lemon drop in his mouth, he sighed and turned towards Umbridge, his eyes telling her to not interrupt him. "Harry will be dealt

with accordingly, but you know as well as I do that I cannot suspend him. He was probably not feeling well and wanted to be left alone. I'll have a talk with him later."

The High Inquisitor opened her mouth to respond but he gave her 'the look'. "That will be all. Now if you'll excuse me, I am in need of Madam Pomfrey's services; her potions to cure migraines will prove to be useful. Goodnight Dolores." That said, the old headmaster exited the Great Hall as the students all piled up to get to their Common Rooms with the help of their Head Boy or Girl and Prefects.

When they got into their room, Seamus, Ron and Neville noticed that Harry had drawn the curtains around his bed and they didn't really know what to do about it. Harry's behavior was something new and with all that had happened last year they were adamant about talking to him. That didn't stop them, though, to try to check out through the curtains to see if he was really sleeping.

Harry knew he was being spied upon and he gritted his teeth until they just gave up and their shadows against his curtains moved away to their own respective beds. He almost snorted at the irony of it all; he could've just screamed and they never would've even heard him! He had put on so many silencing charms around his bed he was sure that if he talked he wouldn't hear his own voice.

'I don't need them to worry about their hero having nightmares and seeing his Godfather dying in a damn veil! Nobody knows how it feels to lose someone so dear to their heart, the only person who ever understood me! He was the only one who truly cared!'

Red flashed just a mere second in his eyes but they quickly became a dull green again and the black haired boy thought about snakes, Tom Riddle, mocking laughter, and his Godfather falling down the veil with Bellatrix leering in his background.

'I'll never be normal. Dursley is right, I am just a freak.' Harry fingered the bruises Dudley and Vernon had left him and fell in a troubled sleep.

He would never go to Pomfrey to make them heal faster. He would be damned before anyone would fuss about poor Harry Potter being

beaten by his only family, and family was a big word. If only he was allowed to do magic out of school; he would've showed them a thing or 2 that would've made Sirius proud.

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Chapter 6: Point loss

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When Harry woke up the next morning, his fellow classmates were already gone to the Great Hall to eat their breakfast. Since he didn't feel like being the center of attention and see Umbridge, he put his clothes on and went towards the kitchen where he was sure the overzealous house-elf Dobby would make him a quick lunch.

He tickled the pear, the entrance to the kitchen, and was immediately assaulted by said house-elf. "Harry Potter!!! What can Dobby do for Mister Harry Potter, sir?" Dobby asked energetically, jumping up and down around the green eyed boy who still looked tired and grumpy.

"Can you make me a quick lunch Dobby? I don't feel like eating in the Great Hall today."

Dobby nodded and ran to the kitchen; Harry could hear the other house-elves tell him to move away but Dobby managed to come back with a basket loaded with fruits and sandwiches, along with a big glass of Pumpkin juice. "Dobby understands why Harry Potter doesn't want to go to the Great Hall!" The small house-elf started in a whisper.

"Everyone is talking about Harry Potter talking back to the nasty High Inquisitor!" Dobby started to bang his head on a table muttering 'Bad Dobby! Bad!' but Harry told him that Umbridge didn't needed to be respected at all.

The house-elf nurtured his poor head and nodded. "If Harry Potter wishes so! But Dobby has to say something to Harry Potter; Dobby thinks Harry Potter did the right thing, if nobody else agrees! Will it be all, Mister Harry Potter sir?"

Harry nodded his thanks and patted the house-elf on the head before exiting the kitchen with a piece of apple in his mouth. 'He's really taken with me...or is it my celebrity?' And once again the light in his eyes diminished while he walked to his class; Transfiguration with McGonagall. 'I'm in for it now...'

And as he predicted, Professor McGonagall was waiting for him in front of the classroom door with angry eyes and tightly sealed lips. "Mr. Potter! Follow me if you please!" She didn't let Harry any time to protest and whirled around as if she had studied Snape's imposing movements, marching right up to her desk while the rest of the students were piling in.

Minerva took a big intake of breath to calm herself and started; "100 points off Gryffindor, Mr. Potter, and I think you very well know why."

A few Gryffindors who were listening to the conversation groaned out loud and shot Harry dark looks, yet neither Harry nor Minerva paid attention, the Head of House simply shooting them a look to make them look elsewhere.

"Now Harry, I know you've had an eventful 5th year and that Umbridge may have gone over the limits a bit but she's still from the Ministry and we don't have any choice but to comply with their wishes. Your words were impolite and completely out of place. In addition to the deducted house points, I ask that the next time you see Dolores Umbridge you ask for forgiveness and serve detention with her. AH!" She glared and put a finger in front of Harry's mouth to stop him from arguing, though it didn't stop him to glare murderously at her.

"Don't argue with me young man or else it will be more house points and a detention with Professor Snape! The woman is hard to get friendly with but I don't think you should make such a big deal about it. She speaks more than she acts anyway. Now go to your place so I can start the class, and don't forget what I said."

Harry felt his blood boil as he went back to his seat, his fists white because he squeezed them too hard. He could almost feel his magic wanting to lash out because of his anger, a little like when he had blown up Aunt Marge a couple of summers ago. He bypassed the snickering Slytherins and took his usual place beside Ron, who didn't look happy about losing house points like the rest of the Gryffindors.

"I admire your courage Harry, but did you really had to make us lose so many house points?! The Slytherin will beat us before Christmas at this rate..." Ron muttered under his breath while McGonagall had her back turned to transfigure a bowl into a living cat.

They were now studying how to transform inanimate things into living things; a better spell than Lapifors and Draconifors anyway.

Harry sealed his lips tightly and grasped his wand so hard he thought the thing would break in half. 'Hooray for Gryffindor spirit! I can't believe how fast they turn their back on each other, so much for trust.' Harry thought darkly, choosing to ignore Ron's grumbling and concentrating, or rather trying to concentrate, on the transfiguration spell.

At the end of the class Harry bolted out of there leaving his half-transformed bowl that was still mewling. He hadn't been able to concentrate at all because of his scar and the viper problem and he ran away when he heard Mc Gonagall calling out to him from the classroom door.

'Enough! You already deducted points, what more do you want to do to me in front of the Slytherins?!' Harry shut his eyes tightly and kept running until he was in the dungeons.

Just great! His feet had subconsciously brought him to his next class with the dreaded potions master, the one who hated him even more because he had peeked into Snape's Pensieve. He hadn't even laughed! He had wanted to apologize for his father's behavior but Snape never left him any chance...even since his 1st year.

The Boy-Who-Lived slumped on the floor and leaned his back on the cold stone wall, burying his head in his knees. He fingered the silent words on his hand unconsciously and sneered, thinking about what Mc Gonagall had said: "Umbridge speaks more than she acts."

He snorted at the irony of it all. If only he had told a teacher about this last year when she was forcing him to do this instead of waiting because of his damned pride! Now no one would believe him if he told them that Umbridge made him do this with a sadistic grin on her face because it was too late and that he had no proof; Umbridge would only deny everything and they would call him a liar even more.

"Well, well, well! Look whose here! Harry Bloody Potter without the Weasel and the Mudblood to back him up! What's going on, Potter? They getting' tired of you? Tired of staying in the shadow behind

you?" Malfoy cocked his head on the side with a smirk, eyeing the black haired boy sitting on the floor.

Crabbe and Goyle laughed stupidly behind the blonde while Pansy let out high pitched giggles, clinging to Draco's arm. When Malfoy noticed that Harry only stiffened but didn't retaliate, he pushed his luck even more. After all, he was in the dungeons and Snape would only get onto his side, not Potter's.

He walked up to the sitting boy and kicked him on the arm when he got a good aim. Unfortunately, he hit one of Harry's injuries from the Dursley making Harry cry out in pain louder than he had wanted and as fast as that, the blonde was slammed onto the wall where the green eyed boy was previously leaning on.

Malfoy hadn't anticipated such a vicious, almost Slytherinesque reaction and his breath caught in his throat for a moment after being slammed backwards. As fast as that, Harry had Malfoy's throat in a grip and his wand in the other, pointing it right between the blonde's now frightened eyes.

Draco had never felt so scared in his life; Potter had never looked at him this way before, and he was truly afraid for his safety now since Potter had threatened that if any of the Slytherins tried to touch him he would fire a curse right between Draco's eyes.

Harry's green orbs darkened so much that from Malfoy's point of view, they were black. "You better watch it, Malfoy! My patience with you has long since disappeared." Harry hissed wrathfully and glowered to appear more imposing; a technique he had borrowed from the potions master. It wasn't a crime! The hat had first wanted to sort him in Slytherin!

Draco opened his mouth to stutter but the blonde sighed in relief as he noticed the rapidly approaching seething potions master. "STUPEFY!"

Harry had heard some of Draco's friends run away to get a Professor, so of course he was waiting for Snape to arrive. He just hadn't thought about Snape finding him in this position; with Malfoy's throat at his hand's mercy and his wand pointed at the blonde's head.

He jumped away swiftly from the ferret as soon as he heard Snape yell out his spell, effectively getting out of the way.

"POTTER! 50 points off Gryffindor for menacing a student! What in Merlin's name were you thinking about!? I will have a talk with Minerva about your attitude, boy! And don't think you'll get away from this that easy!" snapped Snape angrily, his face taking a red hue because he was almost screaming.

In his ranting, he didn't notice Harry flinch when he called him 'boy' and the coldness sweeping in Harry's eyes right afterwards, transforming into indifference.

"I couldn't care less about some silly house points right now. I did this because Malfoy kicked me on the arm but it's hardly worth mentioning isn't? Since you're only going to believe his version of the story anyway. And if you think about punishing me for what I did don't worry, I already have my punishment; I'll have to serve detention with Umbridge. So don't bother to find something worse." The dark haired boy said emotionlessly.

But with emotion or not, Harry answering back at him stunned Severus for a moment until the teacher sneered even more. "20 points for talking back to me Potter. We'll see if your friends like having points deducted faster than you can say 'Quidditch'. As for your punishment, how about a second detention with Umbridge? Umm, yes. I think that'll do it." Snape was now smirking and looking down at him, the other Slytherin members snickering in the background.

Harry didn't look up at him angrily as Snape thought he would; the boy merely stared back at him. Snape found the way to get insulted by this and took Harry by his forearm, again not noticing the boy wince, and pushed him away from the entrance of the classroom door with a sneer.

"Don't bother to come to my class today, Potter. And if it were me, I would've thrown you out of Hogwarts the day you foolishly fought that Mountain troll in the lavatories in your 1st year. Don't bother to come back here until you get your reckless behavior in check. Get out of my

sight." Those were really mean words coming from a teacher, but Snape was feeling particularly cruel today.

Harry didn't even protest (because potions WAS a needed class if someone wanted to become an auror, after all) and turned around, muttering "See if I care anymore" under his breath. Harry thought he heard Snape saying "another 20 points off Gryffindor" but he was already out of the dungeon area so he wasn't sure.

The rest of the day was a complete fiasco; the teachers kept deducting points off Gryffindor because of what he said to Umbridge even though Mc Gonagall had already acted, his 'friends' were ignoring him because they had lost more points in a day than an entire year, the Slytherins kept mocking him and he had the eyes of Dumbledore and the aurors on him during the entire evening meal.

It didn't help that Umbridge was looking at Harry with a wide happy grin, as if a detention with the green eyed boy was her Christmas gift.

From his lonely place, Harry cursed mentally and wallowed in self-pity. 'Sirius...I miss you so much! Why did you have to die? Why not me?' Harry leaned his head on the table and he could feel himself beginning to shake. He was taking big intakes of breath to calm his throbbing scar ("Damn Voldemort is never fucking happy" were his words), when he felt someone slightly shake his shoulders.

The black haired boy looked up emptily to see Lupin looking down at him with worry. "Harry? Are you okay?"

Harry shook off the offending hand and Lupin looked down at him partially with hurt and with apprehension, then in slight anger. "Don't look at me like that!" the werewolf hissed under his breath so no one could understand what they were talking about. "Last year was difficult for all of us! Stop trying to be the center of attention!"

Without noticing it, Lupin had raised his voice and now everyone was looking at the now angry werewolf and the equally, if not more, seething face of Harry Potter who shouted back his answer; "THEN STOP TRYING TO MAKE ME THE CENTER OF ATTENTION AND GET YOURSELVES ANOTHER FUCKING HERO!"

Remus stumbled backwards at the intensity of Harry's voice that boomed over them like thunder. Harry's eyes flashed red momentarily for Remus to see and the boy quickly gasped quietly and closed his eyes tightly in a second, fighting for the control of his mind. But that second had been enough to scare Remus to Hell and back again.

When Harry reopened his eyes they were a dark green, not the usual lime green they were supposed to be. "Leave me alone."

That said, Harry ran out the Great Hall to hide in the deserted and no longer in function Astronomy tower to brood and calm his nerves less he did something drastic.

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The Great Hall was silent, even when Harry Potter made his disturbing exit. For the students it only seemed that the Gryffindor had raised his voice against the werewolf. But Remus Lupin knew better; he turned towards Dumbledore with troubled eyes and the old man stared back at him with not one particle of twinkle in his tired aged eyes.

Umbridge, the ignoring idiot, merely sniffed disdainfully and crossed her arms superiorly. "Why I never! I can't wait to have him in detention tomorrow night! The boy needs to learn more discipline and if nobody wants to do the job, then I sure will! And thanks to Severus the detention will last even longer!"

No one commented on her sudden happiness, maybe except Severus, who smirked in his Butterbeer. The other teachers looked as grave and troubled as they could be.

When he went back to his place, Remus simply let himself fall on the stuffed chair gracelessly and let out a loud sigh, leaning his head in his hands. "I'm afraid that the event of last year was a little too much for him to take, Albus. We should've monitored him more closely this summer." Remus whispered so only Albus, Minerva and Moody understood him.

"I don't know what to do; I've never had so much trouble to control him before. I'm scared for the students Albus. Snape said Harry had

attacked Mister Malfoy earlier. I know Snape has the tendency to overdo it when it comes to his Slytherins but Harry did threaten Malfoy."

Moody grunted as a response and Minerva and Albus nodded slightly, now looking over the animatedly talking students. Ron and Hermione looked as if they didn't know what to do, with everyone asking them if they knew what was wrong with the Boy-Who-Lived. They looked uncomfortable as they told everyone that they didn't know.

"We'll have to keep an eye on him, we don't have another choice" finished the headmaster.

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Chapter 7: Detention Madness

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It was well past 2 in the morning when Mad-Eye Moody finally found Harry Potter, all huddled up in a corner of the Astronomy tower below a window. The moon's shine reflected through the window and cast a calming spell in the atmosphere; the boy was sleeping.

Yet Moody could not help but reach out behind him to feel the comforting length of wood in his back pocket; his trusted wand. After this evening's burst, Mad-Eye was adamant about awakening the boy.

He grunted in the eerie silence. 'I'm an auror for Merlin's sake! AN AUROR! He's just a boy! What am I being nervous for?!' With that new boost of confidence, Mad-Eye marched up to the huddled figure and poked the black haired boy on the head enough to wake Harry on the 1st try.

"Ugh...What?" Harry slurred when he felt someone jab him, effectively waking him up. He groaned when every muscle in his body screamed at him to stop moving. The position he had been sleeping in had been far from being comfortable and the strain of fighting Voldemort for the control of his mind had left him weak.

But that didn't stop Moody, when the auror was sure Harry was fully awake, to grip him by the arm and lift him up in one pull. Harry yelled in pain when Moody pressed on one of his injuries but the auror didn't pay any heed and grunted out; "Time for you to go back to your dormitory, young man."

Moody started to drag the protesting boy towards the staircase and try as he may, Harry was unable to get out of Moody's firm grip as they got down the stairs. "Let me go!" The green eyed boy cried out as Moody's hand dug painfully into his arm and the auror snorted, letting go of the boy when they reached the corridor.

"Stop acting like such a wuss, Potter! I wasn't holding you that tightly. Now let's go back to your dormitory," Alastor grunted out. He slowed

down until Harry was walking in front of him and followed the boy silently.

Harry rubbed his arm and shot Moody a dark look over his shoulder, hoping to melt the auror into the cracks of the stone floor. "I can find my way back to the Gryffindor Common Room by myself, you know." Harry mentioned lightly, but he scowled to himself when Moody remained quiet and continued to trek behind him like a watchdog. 'Why can't he get the hint? It must be Dumbledore's idea to have someone follow me at all times. The fool! It's not helping the matters at all!'

He muttered the password to the fat Lady, who didn't look too thrilled to be awakened at this hour. "Why don't you people sleep at this hour?! I'm always awake all day and-"

"Why don't you just shut up and open the damn door so I can get into bed?!" Harry snapped impatiently at the offended portrait.

The Fat Lady reeled back in shock and the portrait slammed open as Harry walked in. The boy desperately wanted to close the entrance in Moody's face but the auror was too quick and stepped in rapidly.

The green eyed boy ran to his bedroom and closed the curtains around his bed while muttering a silencing spell; it resulted in Moody cursing under his breath and Harry not even hearing him.

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When Harry woke up the next morning, the sight was "funny" to see. The 3 other boys in the room were eyeing Moody weirdly and the auror kept his gaze riveted on Harry's bed. The Boy-Who-Lived rolled his eyes and went to the bathroom to change.

Ron, Neville and Seamus followed Harry nervously while looking back at the following auror. "Hey Harry?" Ron started, "How come Mad-Eye seem to follow you?"

Harry merely waved his hand in dismissal and continued to walk. "Ignore him. Dumbledore's probably worried that I'll destroy the school."

The 3 other Gryffindors froze momentarily in the middle of the corridor and held their breath; it seemed as if they just only remembered Harry's outburst yesterday.

The green eyed boy looked back at them and rolled his eyes. "Jeez, I was only joking. Thanks for believing in me you guys, thanks a lot." Harry trekked on towards his 1st class alone so he didn't see Ron's ears redden.

Seamus and Neville squeaked nervously when Moody passed beside them and the 3 boys stared as Harry disappeared down the corridor with Mad-Eye hot on his trail.

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Charms class had been neutral. Gryffindor was mixed with the usually friendly Hufflepuff but it seemed as if everyone had taken on ignoring Harry. The dark haired wizard didn't feel at all insulted and instead welcomed the peace it provided.

They learned a strong freezing charm called 'Glacius' and Harry, for once not being bothered, succeeded in doing the spell at the 1st try (yet no one bothered to felicitate him except a small "Good" from Flitwick).

For once the class went well and fast and Harry exited Flitwick's class with a satisfied expression even though it was a serious Tonks that was now following him at a fair distance.

She probably thought that Harry wouldn't notice her without her patch of bright neon pink hair but he had felt that he was being followed again when Moody had taken his leave. It bothered him that he could not be alone but since he had classes he would brood over it later.

When he entered potions class, all the Slytherins turned and some snickered at him mockingly while others simply sneered at him. Harry sat at the end of the classroom so that if something were to happen he would be able to get out faster.

Luckily, or maybe unluckily for him because she would not see the treatment Snape only reserved for him, Tonks stayed outside the

classroom while the class was in session. Or maybe it was because she didn't want to feel the wrath of Snape? Who knows...

Entering in his same billowing robes manner, Snape glanced at him and sneered shortly before starting his class. Snape criticized everything he did and Harry found out he couldn't concentrate.

Add a snickering Draco in the mix and Snape breathing down his neck every 2 seconds, the result was evident: Harry added too much newt powder to his potion and it turned a deep shade of violet before the thing exploded all over his work table.

The green eyed boy grimaced and shot Snape and Malfoy dirty and irritated looks while the professor kept reprimanding him and deducting even more points from Gryffindor. "POTTER! Can't you do anything right?! You're worse than Longbottom! 50 points from Gryffindor and you'll stay after class to clean that up! Without magic!" Snape snapped with a glare in his direction.

Harry fought the urge to rub the purple goop all over his teacher's already greasy hair and started to scrub his desk while the others brought their vials to Snape. Malfoy passed beside him and "accidentally" shoved him on the side. "Oh, sorry Potter, I didn't see you there."

Harry's eyes darkened and he fingered his wand in his pocket almost vehemently, making Snape deduct 10 more points. It seemed as if the professor was winning; with each insult and act of degradation, Harry's mind darkened even more and he was once again on the edge of snapping. Snape would probably not even know what hit him if that happened either.

It took him an hour to clean everything up; the goop was really sticky and some had even dripped on the floor. As a result, he missed then entire lunch break and didn't get to eat anything.

Snape had been gone for a while, probably to the Great Hall to eat after ordering him not to use any magic or he would know. Harry didn't wait for Snape's approval to get out of the damp and humid dungeons and ran to his next class, hoping to be on time.

He barely made it, Tonks still following dutifully behind him. Care of Magical Creatures had always been one of Harry's favorite subjects but now even Hagrid looked unsure about him and kept avoiding him.

They were now studying Centaurs, so poor Firenze had accepted to be the subject while they discussed centaur physiognomy and tendencies. Harry could see that Firenze was feeling edgy to be standing so close to his once beloved forest.

'Probably the thought of Bane emerging from the forest to punish him is scaring him...' Harry mused silently; he was one of the few who knew why Firenze kept clear of the Forbidden Forest now.

The class seemed so long; every time he held up his hand to answer a question he was ignored, making him scowl and making the students edge away from him slowly. Firenze just kept his neutral 'I-know-something-you-don't-the stars-told-me' face and Harry found himself running once again at the end of the class, giving Tonks a hard time trying to follow him.

He did lost her on the way, but the thought of the next class made him freeze in the middle of a corridor. Defense Against the Dark Arts...with Umbridge. Harry suddenly wanted to throw up right there and run away. The thought of Sirius hit him again like a ton of bricks and his fingers automatically stroked the 'I will not tell lies' on his hand.

He started to turn around blindly when a fast hand gripped the collar of his cloak in a death grip. He met the face of none other than Dolores Umbridge, the viper in person. "Well, well, well! What do we have here? Not trying to skip class are you, my dear Harry? You even have a detention with me, how wonderful!" Umbridge grinned maliciously and Harry wrenched her hand away.

"Don't call me by my first name! I never gave you my permission, and you're not my friend!" Harry snarled with hatred written in his eyes.

The malicious grin transformed into a malicious glare. "Watch your words, Potter. They could be your downfall." The woman turned around and went back to her classroom.

The other students started to pass by him and enter the classroom, so Harry didn't have any choice but to get in himself; Tonks had returned to her post outside the door with a glare in his direction. It looks like she didn't appreciate running behind him.

"Today I want everybody to read pages 24 to 67 in your books and do a 10 pages report on what you will read. Don't dally and start reading." Umbridge really wasn't in a good mood and she sat on her chair with a frown in the students' direction.

Everyone groaned and took out their DADA book as she asked/ordered. Harry stared at the heavy volume and pretended to start reading; he had already read this book in the school library, like every other books on the subject.

'So she's starting the same pattern as last year; to make us only read and not practice so we won't be able to retaliate against the ministry, and mostly against her. The bitch! I should've known! She didn't learn her lesson last year!' Harry thought darkly and dreaded his detention.

He desperately wanted to formulate a plan that would get rid of her but it seemed as if every one of his ideas ended in Umbridge dying or being put under Cruciatus until she was good for St-Mungo's.

Positioning his book so she wouldn't see him, he started to write the damn homework. He had a good 6 pages done when the class ended and the students all piled up in the door to get away from Umbridge.

Harry could hear, amongst the students who were eager to get away:

"This is the worst class ever!"

"I can't believe she gave us 10 pages to write!"

"And I can't believe we didn't even do 1 spell! I hope we won't have to read like this all year long!"

This time, both Gryffindor and Slytherin were agreeing with each other. Draco looked unsure; Umbridge was a great ally so what she said had to be good.

Harry tried to get away by walking in the group of students but Umbridge was too fast and pulled him out of the mass by his arm and made him sit back down on his chair. "Here's a loose parchment, Potter. Take this plume and I want you to write 'I will not defy the High Inquisitor' 100 times."

Umbridge went to the door and seemed to be talking with someone, more like arguing in hushed tones until the argument "I am the High Inquisitor do as I say!" was brought forth.

Harry heard someone stomping their way down the corridor and he lifted an eyebrow; it seemed as if Tonks had also been a victim of Umbridge's ego.

She looked oddly pleased with herself when she went back to her desk to stare at him. She also cast a locking spell on the door so Harry wouldn't try to get out so Harry had no more choices but to glance down at the familiar plume she had given him last year.

With apprehension and a great sentiment of hatred towards the viper, he took the plume and started to write slowly, expecting great pain. What was his surprise when he felt nothing, not even the beginning of a stinging feeling on his hand.

He looked at the grinning Umbridge suspiciously before continuing to write. 30 lines, 40 lines... Nothing.

Harry was beginning to become nervous. Something was way wrong and Umbridge kept grinning like an idiot madwoman. As he suspected and feared, a stinging sensation ran through him when he started the 50th line.

Except that this time it wasn't his hand that was hurting and his eyes widened considerably, not believing one moment that she had dared to do such a thing, and that a plume like this even existed.

If the *thing* he was using to write had the same consequences as the last one, his chest was starting to bleed at this very moment. A deep feeling of abhorrence began to rise in his heart as he sneered at her with the coldest glare he could muster.

Umbridge sneered back at him. "Come on, Potter. I suspect you're on your 50th line? You're not finished yet! WRITE! Now you won't ever defy me! Kids like you are worthless and I'll put you to your place if no one will do it!" Now Umbridge was trying his patience.

Harry sneered one last time and started to write again, wincing when he felt a deep pain on his chest, but not even at the same place. This plume was using his blood and marking his chest at various places every time he was beginning a new phrase.

As the time passed, writing was beginning to be more difficult and unbearable. The green eyed boy could feel his clothes sticking to his chest and his blood trickling from his wounds.

On the 80th line he could take no more and threw the plume on the floor. "Take the plume Potter and finish your detention." Now she was smiling at him eerily.

Harry got up and tossed his chair away fiercely, taking a few steps backwards. "Like Hell I will! I will no longer do what you say! You can't control me! What you're doing is illegal and I'll tell someone!"

Harry stepped back even more as the High Inquisitor got up and walked threateningly towards him. "Impudent boy! You will tell no one! And I know this because you're a Gryffindor! Your courage and idiocy will prevent you from talking about this, I know! You're so easy to manipulate! Now take the plume!"

She was in front of him now and Harry's back was leaning against the locked door. Harry's breathing increased dramatically as he felt threatened and vulnerable and in an instant his eyes flashed red. **"NO!"**

His magic went haywire and without even using his wand, his body acted with the help of his subconscious. A burst of magic resembling the Expelliarmus hit Umbridge dead on and the woman was thrown backwards.

Since the intuitive spell acted all around him and in a greater intensity, the 'Expelliarmus' destroyed the locking charm on the door and blew

it off its hinges. The Boy-Who-Lived regained his mind minutes later, breathing heavily and sweating, looking around him on alert mode.

Umbridge was lying in an undignified heap on the floor, unconscious, and Harry ran away from there all too willingly. 'I have enough! Too much! I've endure too much! I can't take much more of this!'

His mind was reeling as he ran blindly down the maze that was Hogwarts' corridors. The castle was quiet; it probably was around midnight or so and Snape was probably prowling somewhere trying to catch delinquents and rule-breakers, namely he as he knew Snape's thought about him.

'Professor Quirrell, the Basilisk, Sirius, Cedric's death and the 'Prio*ri* Incantatem', Umbridge and her confiscating my Firebolt and now she's back and trying to make me bleed to death!!! I CAN'T TAKE THIS ANYMORE! I'M GOING CRAZY!'

He was caught in a moment of panic and his face was as white as Moaning Myrtle, probably because of the blood he had lost earlier and still loosing, and he unconsciously stepped in said ghost's lavatories.

Moaning Myrtle looked at him and giggled happily. "You're as white as me! Are you going to die? If so, then I don't mind sharing my lavatories with you, Harry!"

The dark haired boy didn't even hear her as he hissed the words that would open the way to the entrance of the Chamber of Secrets. Myrtle gasped momentarily and shrugged, going back to brood in one of her toilets.

Without really seeing anything, he let himself drop into the large tunnel and he landed ungracefully and tiredly on the huge pile of bones down below. Walking was a hard task, especially after the heavy blood lost, and Harry kept a hand on his chest even though his clothes were soaking wet with his blood.

"And there- I thought- Dumbledore knew- when I was in danger!" Harry wheezed out, breathing deeply between each word or so.

"Proves- that he doesn't- care at all- about me! He only wants to bask- in the Boy-Who-Lived's fame! Just like all- the others!"

He hissed the password another time to the steel door and the snakes moved so the door could open. "I'm a freak!" –*huff*- "Why do they all want my fame?"

He stumbled in the main Chamber and walked the pathway to the statue of whom he thought was Salazar Slytherin. "Rest...I have to rest. I'm okay here. I'm the only one who can enter here and the tunnel closed behind me. No spell, even the most powerful one, even if it was one of the wizards from the 'Order of whatever' who cast it, would be able to open the entrance without being a Parselmouth." Harry kept muttering to himself, trying to reassure himself to calm his wildly beating heart.

His mind wasn't clear and he took his cloak off with great difficulty. He took off his now red t-shirt and tossed it aside to see the damage on his chest. It wasn't a pretty sight to see; the magic plume had taken a lot of his blood so he vaguely wondered how it kept pouring out of the deep cuts.

Harry took his wand and muttered a simple healing spell he had learned from madam Pomfrey. In his state it didn't do much and barely stopped the bleeding. He knew that if he didn't do anything about it soon it would scar and never fade, but it would be a while until he showed up again in the light side of Hogwarts.

The tired boy wrapped his cloak absentmindedly around his torso to reduce the bleeding and he fell into a deep sleep, unable to keep his eyes open. It was damp, humid and cold, even more so than Snape's dungeons, but never had he welcomed silence like this so happily.

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Chapter 8: Within the chamber a secret lies

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Twisting and turning, crying and shouting; Harry's slumber was far from being peaceful. The Dursleys kept yelling at him and beating him, his mother kept screaming "Not Harry!", Snape was sneering at him, Voldemort kept trying to enter his mind and Sirius kept dying over and over again.

Harry's own screaming woke him up and he found out his voice was now hoarse and his throat burned, less so than his forehead. It seemed as if he had developed a fever over the night (he supposed it was the day since there weren't any windows here).

The good news was; his blood had stopped flowing. The bad news; it hurt and itched like hell and he didn't have any gauze with him. All of these factors mixed together were enough to make him grumpy and irritable.

"Umbridge must be in the infirmary telling everyone that I tried to kill her." Harry snorted frustratingly and took out his wand to just gaze at it as if it was going to help him solve his problems.

"I'm really in for it now. I can't show myself now or else Umbridge will have my head and Dumbledore himself will follow me everywhere and try to read my mind. If I'm lucky I'll be sacked and sent back to the Dursleys. I'll just have to run away if that happens."

Harry winced when he got up and the thought of Umbridge lying on the floor, although she deserved it, came back full force along with the consequences that followed: she could be able to make him go to Azkaban for God's sake!

"ARGHHHH! WHY CAN'T I BE NORMAL?!?" In a cry of rage, he let go of a burst of magic from his wand in a random direction to let go of some steam. The unidentified spell hit a wall hidden in the shadows and Harry felt a wave of magic come back to him.

His angered face turned into one of curiosity and, with his wand at the ready just in case, he walked up to the wall and cast a Lumos spell to

see better. The wall seemed ordinary and he poked at it with his wand. The magic protecting the wall actually became visible and fluctuated, as if the magic was old and unstable.

Harry used the Finite Incantatum first to see if it was any good; the spell used on this wall had probably been a strong one but the age didn't help it one bit. He then cast Alohomora on the wall and it took only seconds before the protective spell literally crumbled under the unlocking spell.

Harry yelled and backed away in a defensive stance when the seemingly ordinary stone wall started to crack in the middle and opened slowly, debris and dust falling on the ground from years of being still.

The boy wiped his feverish forehead with the back of his hand and stared open-mouthed at the uncovered room. Not a speck of dust could be detected inside this new chamber when outside, in the Basilisk's lair, it was damp and gloomy.

Harry had to admit it was a beautiful room whereat the exterior was less than inviting. The wet stony ground transformed into white marble floor and the hidden room was decorated in an oddly old-fashioned way. But what caught his attention the most was the bed in the very middle of this room. The occupied bed in the middle of the room.

He approached it carefully and stopped halfway to look at the many rows of doors on his right side. "Alohomora!" Harry waited but nothing happened; he shook his wand, as if it would help!, and repeated the spell. Still nothing.

The boy shrugged and continued to walk towards the bed. "Must be protected by one hell of a strong spell if it's still holding after all these years," Harry muttered to himself, talking about the locked door.

When he finally, carefully arrived at his destination, he stared at the person lying amongst the golden sheets. "It's a girl! But for how long has she been sleeping here?" Harry wondered, after seeing the rise and fall of a still breathing chest.

He brought his hand mere centimeters away from her face as if to touch her but he pulled back at the last second, walking around the bed 1st to study her. 'She looks my age', he noticed silently, yet her hair was an iridescent shade of silver. He could tell it was long; it disappeared under the sheets and reappeared on each sides of the bed, trailing slightly on the ground.

Looking closer, the bed itself also got his attention. They weren't very pronounced so he didn't notice them at 1st, but now that he did he was shocked speechless; carvings. Carvings representing snakes and lions on the same panel! Preposterous!

But now that he paid more attention to the room, the locked doors also had carvings on them, which looked oddly like old family crests. But why would someone put 2 very different crests in the same room? The mystery became too hard to bear and he marched right back to the bed with determination.

"!" He was sure his spell would rebound against a shield of some sort like with the doors but he backed away in surprise when the mysterious girl actually moved and turned on her side, her back facing him. She sat up with a silent yawn and looked at her surroundings, obviously a little lost after sleeping for so long.

"Ummm...Excuse me?" Harry called out hesitantly and took a step forward.

The girl whirled around to gaze at him with a look Harry couldn't decipher, yet she remained silent.

Harry was in awe, she was incredibly beautiful and her eyes were the strangest color he had ever seen; one was a vivid green, almost like his, and the other was a rich blue. It looked as if she feared him, as if she had never seen anyone in her whole life.

Harry smiled softly. "I won't hurt you and I'm the only one here. Who are you?" He held up his and waited for her to move.

'Should I trust him? I've never talked with anyone beside my fathers... But if he entered the Chamber of Secrets and got past my

Basilisk, he must be trustworthy.’ She extended her arm slowly and touched his fingers experimentally, then took his hand.

Harry breathed a sigh of relief as she let her guard down and moved to get up. She and Harry let out shocked yelps as she fell on the ground because her legs couldn’t carry her weight and she brought Harry down with her because in his present state he couldn’t hold her.

They both just stood there, she half on top of him, blinking their surprise away until Harry let out small snorts of laughter. “Looks like your legs are still asleep! But I’m in no better shape, though...” he then mumbled.

She looked at him questioningly and noticed his bloodied clothes. She delicately pushed his cloak aside and traced the fresh marks marring his chest, looking apologetically at him every time he winced in pain. “Don’t move.”

Harry’s head snapped up when he heard her speak for the 1st time. Her voice was calm and relaxing; it was probably the years of being unused that made her wait before speaking.

His attention was brought back to his chest when it started to warm up. He looked down in awe at her hand on his chest; it was glowing slightly, a dark violet, almost black. The blood disappeared and the wounds started to scar over. He thought they were going to vanish but she stopped before they could completely close.

“I can’t do this in one shot. I will try again another day; I’ve been sleeping for too long and my magic is trying to adapt again,” was her silent response to his questioning look.

“How...?”

She showed the ghost of a smile and got up slowly with success. Harry also got up and stayed in place. She seemed adamant about answering to his question. “I don’t really know. I’ve always had these strange bursts of magic and I knew how to use them.”

She started on another subject, getting used to talking with that boy instead of her fathers. "You got past the basilisk." It wasn't meant to be a question, just a statement.

Harry blinked at the change of subject but he answered nonetheless. "The Basilisk? It's been dead for 5 years now."

Her head snapped up and she backed away from him, now looking at Harry with suspicion, almost bordering hatred. "Impossible! You're lying!"

Harry frowned. 'Why is she defending that monster?'

"Why are you so concerned about it? It tried to kill me in my 2nd year because Voldemort had ordered it to! It had killed muggleborns 50 years ago or so and now it was going to do it again! It had to be stopped!" he finished with conviction.

Tears fell from her eyes when she sensed no lies from him and she sat on the marble floor, weeping silently for her familiar.

Harry awkwardly sat beside her, trying to console her as best as he could.

"Tell me."

Harry gave her a curious look. "Tell you what?"

She looked back at him with determination; she wanted, no...needed the truth. "Everything. I want to know what happened to the Basilisk to make it turn to the dark side. Who is Voldemort? And who is the High Inquisitor?"

Harry frowned. "How do you know about the High Inquisitor?"

She gave him a sheepish look and pointed at his chest. He understood and scowled at his chest before giving her a small sorry grin. And Harry started to tell the story, compelled to answer her questions.

When he finally finished, she stayed oddly contemplative. "So Tom Riddle named himself Voldemort and considered himself as the heir of Salazar Slytherin...And you killed the Basilisk. I don't know if I should kill you for this or thank you. I should choose the latter since it is no longer suffering. But how did you kill it?"

Harry blinked. "I used the sword of Godric Gryffindor."

Her eyes widened and she all but shouted in shock. She got up and started to pace in the room, muttering nonsense under her breath. "I can't believe it!... Impossible!... Gryffindor killing Slytherin!... They must be rolling in their graves right now!"

At this point Harry was confused. "Why are you defending the Slytherins so much? Everyone knows that Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor were sworn enemies!"

She looked at him emptily for a moment and then asked; "What year is it?"

Now Harry seemed to remember that he had found her asleep for only God knows how long. "It's 2004."

She exhaled loudly, her eyes wide and disbelieving, until she seemed to accept this fact and she smirked. "So, even thousands of years later they are still fooling everyone."

Harry was completely lost.

"Did you know, Harry, that your Voldemort isn't the direct heir of Salazar Slytherin but of his brother Salomon? It's not common knowledge, but Salazar did have a brother; an adept of dark magic. No wonder why Tom Riddle turned out like he is now. And I'm sorry to say this and break our fun, but Salazar and Godric were the best of friends."

Harry looked outraged and looked at her with a rather obvious disbelieving look. "And how can you be so sure about that?! What makes you think such a thing?! All I've heard since I arrived in Hogwarts is that Slytherin was evil! You can't just tell me to believe this without any proof!"

He started to pace around until his headache made him slow down, wince, and sit back down until the room stopped spinning.

Understanding that he needed to rest, she silently helped him up and made him lie on the bed she previously was sleeping in. Harry couldn't find courage to tell her to leave him alone so he let her do as she wished.

He sighed tiredly and massaged his temples in an effort to relax, though the sweet smell on her pillow was doing a bang up job of it.

To hear such things coming from someone he had just met, things that completely defied everything he had believed in up until now... it was almost too much. "What's your name anyway? I never asked you," he said in a tired voice.

"..."

She sat on a chair nearby and looked at him in the eyes, even though he was half there. "It's so weird to be speaking with somebody else. I never once spoke to another person before, excepted with my fathers. My name is Serenity. Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin."

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Chapter 9: I need you to believe me

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Last time

She sat on a chair nearby and looked at him in the eyes, even though he was half there. "It's feels so weird to be speaking with somebody else. I never once spoke to another person before, excepted with my fathers. My name is Serenity. Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin."

NOW

Harry blinked...and blinked again. Once his brain analysed the last phrase he shot up in bed, forgetting his pounding headache for a moment. His breath caught in his throat and he exclaimed quite loudly; "WHAT?! Do you really think I'll believe this nonsense?!"

She closed her eyes and willed herself not to run away. "I don't expect you to believe me, not yet anyway. But I have been asleep for a thousand years, that I'm sure of. The last thing I remember is seeing father Salazar putting the special sleeping spell daddy Godric and he invented."

She looked downcast and put her head into her hands, a few tears falling from her eyes. "I'm sure he died not long after, those bastards from the ministry always did have an eye on him."

Harry's mouth opened and closed...and opened. "I don't get it. I don't get *you*."

She flashed him a sad smile and started again; "Harry, my fathers were Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin. I had no mother and this is no case of wizard pregnancy. I was genetically created. I was created by them as an experiment first. They wanted to see what the result would be if they combined their bloodline together, and only theirs. I was the only successful experiment, God only knows why, and they soon learned to love me as their own daughter. I can't say that I haven't lived a happy life, but there were consequences to my being. I couldn't go out where people would see me and because of

that I've always stayed in father Salazar's mansion. Father Salazar had purposely created himself a bad reputation to be left alone while they agreed that daddy Godric kept the people's attention on himself. They couldn't be seen together, less so with me. To them I was their daughter, but to the other wizards I would've been a creation, a menace, a weapon with a bloodline more powerful than any other wizard, a monster. I grew up and saw Hogwarts come to life, and my fathers were my teachers. Father Salazar risked a lot by going to Knockturn Alley –Does it still exist?–” she asked Harry in mid phrase.

Harry shuddered in remembrance of his 2nd year and nodded. “Yeah.”

She nodded and went on. “Well anyway, that's where he got me a Basilisk egg. See where this leads on?”

Harry paled but she shrugged him off.

“But it's a little later that this story turns for the worst. Somehow the minister found the way to arrest father Salazar for his dark deeds, though he never truly did anything wrong. He brought me here hurriedly and, after locking the Basilisk in the mouth of his grandfather's statue, he put the special sleeping spell on me. I knew he would never surrender and die this very day. Since daddy Godric wasn't a Parselmouth he wasn't able to come back for me. I don't even know what he did later or how he died.” She wiped her bitter tears away and brought her knees together to lean on them.

Harry stayed silent for a while, thinking all of this over. Sometimes her story made sense, but there was 1 little problem; “How can I know if you're truly who you say you are? I don't think you have a tattoo on your back that says; ‘I'm the daughter of Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor!’”

She lifted a finely sculpted eyebrow. “Look around you. I think there are enough proofs around my bed and on the doors. But you can always look in the school library to check up their family crests. And maybe the story of Salazar Slytherin while you're at it. They've probably changed a couple of things, those bastards, but look at the similarities.”

Harry thought this over. "Hmm...I'll have to get out of here eventually but it'll be difficult to get the book on Salazar Slytherin. Since he's considered to be a dark wizard, it'll probably be in the Restricted Section. Not easy to go there and now I'll probably have a lot of eyes riveted on me. I'll try anyway; I do want to believe you but it's not easy."

She nodded in understanding. "Take your time. Just don't tell anyone of my existence. I refuse to be the prey of those from the Ministry of Magic. I swore my revenge but I'm not ready to face the world. I accepted you probably because you're a Parselmouth to begin with, and because I could feel a great sadness in you. We're alike, whether you like it or not."

Harry almost snorted but refrained from doing so. "Maybe. I'll try to come back as soon as possible. But I'll have to face the consequences of my actions..." he finished darkly with a dangerous glint in his eyes.

He blinked when he felt 2 arms wrap around his midsection in a comforting and soothing manner.

"You'll always be welcome here. Don't wait for the darkness to take over, come to see me every time you need it."

Then, the comforting embrace was gone and the stone wall was slowly closing behind him, the silver haired girl flashing him a small encouraging smile.

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The trek towards the exit of the Chamber of Secrets seemed excruciatingly long and eerily quiet for Harry. With each step, his legs felt heavier and numb. Never a conversation like the one he just had had sparked his interest so and he wished he could just go back to her and believe her.

"Give them a chance" she had told him. *"Give them a chance to understand what you are feeling"*.

It was weird to receive such an advice coming from one who had never once spoken to another human being except for her 'fathers'. Maybe she had psychic powers? Or a mind reading ability, perhaps? But he hadn't felt his mind being prodded so it was another question left unanswered.

His mind brought him to his other preoccupations and the simple thought of Umbridge made him bristle. When he moved to turn around and go back to the Chamber, the entrance was already closing and he was back in Myrtle's lavatory without even noticing it.

"I have so many things in my head I can't even concentrate. It's getting stupid," he muttered to himself while looking around. He had been right; the sunlight outside indicated that it was about mid-day and there was no one in the bathroom as usual.

Moaning Myrtle then decided to make herself known with a shrill cry that nearly tore down Harry's eardrums. "Who's there? I'm warning you! This is the GIRL'S lavatory!"

She passed through one of the cubicles' door and floated above the dark haired wizard with a happy face once she spotted him. But she was smiling way too much and it gave Harry the creeps.

"HARRY! You're back! Oh, you've been a naughty boy haven't you? Everyone is looking for you! I've heard the portraits gossiping, that I have! They're saying that Umbridge wants to bring you to court and send you to Azkaban prison! If they kill you, you can always come back and haunt my lavatory with me!" she said in delight.

"Gee thanks Myrtle. That's very encouraging," Harry deadpanned angrily, his 'dark' mood resurfacing. Without saying goodbye he walked out of the deserted lavatory and strolled slowly in the empty corridor.

"I'm just glad that the Chamber of Secrets doesn't figure on the Marauder's Map."

He kept his face blank and his posture as straight and dignified as he could. Willing his heart to stop beating so wildly had been way too

easy. He held his head up high and stepped in the main corridor of this floor.

The few students who were busying around or bothering Mrs. Norris stopped whatever they were doing to stare and gawk at him; some had surprised looks, some had the mix of curiosity or fear.

He paid them no heed, even if, as he passed by a few 2nd year Ravenclaws, they ran away from this floor altogether. He stepped on the changing staircases until he arrived on the 1st floor.

Students once again started to stare at him silently and stopped moving as if he was going to hex them as he passed by them. His target was actually the main doors of Hogwarts.

Harry desperately wanted to go outside, to feel the wind wiping in his face and ruffling his hair even more. The fresh air would help him clear his mind but as his hand nearly reached the gigantic double doors, he felt more than heard the threatening magic coming towards him.

Harry reacted on instinct, and Merlin did he have a lot of it! He crouched low and turned around, his wand pointing towards central staircase. The spell hit where his back previously was and put a nasty dent in the left door.

‘Expelliarmus!’ His mind screamed. ‘Someone just tried to hit me with an Expelliarmus behind my back! It could’ve crushed my bones!’

When he came out of his reverie, all the students were being rushed away by the Prefects and Moody and Lupin were restraining a screaming Umbridge by her arms while Tonks tried to get the Inquisitor’s wand, without success; the older woman kept flailing her arms madly and yelling at him.

“LET ME GO! I’LL SEND HIM TO AZKABAN! HE ATTACKED ME! NOBODY DARES TO ATTACK ME AND GETS OUT OF THIS UNSCATHED!” Umbridge screeched and shouted, her face as red as a ripe tomato.

Harry glared but kept his cool, getting up and slightly lowering his wand to reassure the professors who had their wand trained on him. To see Harry relax helped the others to also lower their defences and settle down.

Harry almost chuckled when he saw Snape's wand hand itch but he remained impassive; he was in enough trouble already and didn't need to be in more. "It was an accident. I was angry and my magic went haywire. I didn't even use my wand when it happened. So don't accuse me of willingly attacking you when you did everything to push my buttons," Harry replied coldly to Umbridge's accusations.

The viper started to shout again, denying what the green eyed boy was saying. "HE'S LYING! HOW CAN HE PROOVE THAT HE DIDN'T USE HIS WAND?!" Try as she may, she still couldn't get out of Moody's and Lupin's grip.

Dumbledore stepped in front of Umbridge and gave her a look that made her shove her next words down her throat. He then glanced at Snape out the corner of his solemn blue eyes and the potions master nodded ever so slightly.

Harry's eyes widened and he gripped his head and shut his eyes closed when he felt someone trying to prod his mind. He tried to fight back but it was difficult with all his past memories resurfacing.

The others around him were beginning to grow worried. "What's happening to him Albus?!" Minerva asked with a worried voice.

Albus forbid her to approach the boy with a gentle grip on her shoulder. "We are merely trying to prove a point, so be patient all of you."

Nobody understood what the headmaster was talking about or who was "we", but nobody dared to disobey him, not even when Harry cried out in pain as his mental barrier shattered and he cried out "PLEASE! NO MORE! NO MORE!"

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His mother was screaming, he was being chased by a dog on Privet Drive, it was his 1st day in Hogwarts... All his memories shook in his head as if someone was searching for a precise memory. "Kill the spare!" made him cry out and seeing Sirius falling through the veil made him drop to his knees and scream in pain, the foreign language being uttered behind the black curtains of the veil.

The teachers winced when his cry of pain resonated throughout the entire entrance but still the memories kept popping out of his almost non-existent barrier. The flashbacks slowed down when came the time of his detention with Umbridge.

Harry was able to blur the memory of the "quill from hell" but the Legilimens forced his way back when Umbridge was standing threateningly above him with her wand pointed at him.

The one prodding his mind saw Harry unconsciously make use of "wandless magic", more like uncontrolled magic. Harry felt his mind being prodded even more when he ran away from the scene as if 'he' wanted to know where Harry had gone for the days he had been missing.

The Boy-Who-Lived felt anger rise and boil within him.

It was HIS private life! It was HIS secret! And nobody, NOBODY, had any rights to know of 'her'!

In an instant he was up and turning towards the potions master. **"IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!!!"** He screamed, breaking the mind connection as his eyes flashed red and a wave of his wild magic went hurling towards Severus Snape.

The teacher shook his head to come back to reality after his mind was assaulted viciously and he barely had the time to erect a proper Protego to avoid being sent backwards onto the castle's hard floor. His shield bent but held until the boy collapsed in a dead faint due to his lack of good sleep and blood loss he still hadn't properly recuperated.

After a sign from Dumbledore, Poppy rushed to the boy and levitated him towards the infirmary without further ado, ignoring altogether

Umbridge's ranting. "What in Merlin's name just happened?" was the only stupid thing she asked, her mouth wide opened.

"They only proved a point, Inquisitor. No need to eat all the flies now."

Umbridge's mouth closed with a *clack!* as Firenze passed beside her with a superior and mocking smirk.

"Don't push your luck, Centaur! My patience has limits!" She hissed to the magical creature when everyone was gone, probably to the infirmary to check on the 'Golden Boy' (though Severus had simply gone back to his dungeon).

Firenze turned around swiftly, his hooves thumping on the stone floor with fervour. Umbridge took a step backwards in surprise and nervousness but quickly regained her wits. The centaur couldn't attack her. In fact she liked to provoke him; if he attacked her he would be sent straight to Azkaban or worse...killed.

But Firenze merely looked at her with his cold, calculating eyes and smirked even more. "Your patience may have limits but I have an infinite amount of it. And maybe you will get what you deserve when you push young Potter's patience to its limit. Believe me, the stars told me he didn't have a lot of it those days. Wouldn't want anything to happen to you now, do we?"

With one mysterious look that left Umbridge wondering if he was leading her on or actually being serious, Firenze left to his classroom.

"You watch out, the lot of you," she whispered maliciously to herself, "I may not have as much influence as I had last year but that'll quickly change. We'll see who will truly control Hogwarts soon..."

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Chapter 10: Suspension

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“Is he okay? We were so worried all week but he wouldn’t let us go near him!”

Harry rose from his slumber when he heard a familiar voice. Hermione was speaking to Madam Pomfrey with an anxious voice but the matron refused to let neither her, nor Ron for that matter, approach his bed.

“I’m sorry Miss Granger but Mister Potter is sleeping right now and it wouldn’t do any good to awaken him; I made him drink a cup of Sleeping Draught anyway so he’ll be sleeping for quite some time.”

Harry internally grimaced. So *that* was the foul taste in his mouth.

Hermione and Ron started to protest in earnest until Snape made his grand entrance, followed by Dumbledore. “Granger! Weasley! 20 points off Gryffindor! Get to class right now!” the potions master snapped impatiently.

Hermione and Ron gave him hateful looks but they complied nonetheless, their heads bent as they walked by Snape. Dumbledore gave them a sorry glance and a reassuring smile. “We’re doing this for Harry’s interest. You all know he needs help right now.”

The 2 Gryffindors merely nodded and exited the infirmary.

The green eyed boy sneered mentally. ‘Good formula to say that I’m crazy and that they can’t stay alone with me.’ His anger subsided slightly to hear what Pomfrey, Dumbledore and Snape were saying, talking in hushed tones.

“Albus, the boy is still sleeping. Are you sure it was a good thing to make Severus prod his memories? The boy is tired beyond anything and he’s as pale as a ghost. I checked him quickly and he had a dangerous level of anemia. It stabilized not so long ago but Mister Potter never showed such level of tiredness before. He clearly lost

some blood, but how? He wasn't bleeding from anywhere, anyway from what I've seen during my quick check-up." Poppy gave a worried glance towards Harry but Snape quickly changed the subject with a disdainful sneer.

"So what? He's okay now so instead of worrying over your damned precious Golden Boy, Albus, we should concentrate on what we'll do with him! Umbridge is going to have a field trip with this if we don't sack him!"

Albus sighed tiredly and massaged his temple when Snape and Pomfrey started to bicker.

Harry started to have a headache himself and felt Voldemort trying to prod his mind slightly. This caused the boy to sit up in his bed and close his eyes in vain concentration. 'You won't win, Tom.'

He didn't know why he had such a new will to survive all of a sudden. Probably because there was someone in Hogwarts who was giving him a new reason to live. The noise in his head stopped of its own and he opened his eyes, his gaze riveted on the stone wall in front of him.

"...impossible Albus! I gave him a full vial of Sleeping Draught!" Pomfrey exclaimed from somewhere in the room.

Looks like Harry had stunned them speechless when he had sat up so suddenly. Albus walked towards him guardedly and gave him a tentative smile.

'Trying to gain my favor again, are you?' Harry thought in anger. He kept his face neutral and the headmaster's smile transformed into a sad look.

"Harry, I'm sorry about earlier. But you must understand that we needed to know and prove if what you were saying was right."

Harry gave him an empty look, completely ignoring what Albus just tried to explain. "Are you going to send me back to the Dursleys?" he asked in a dead voice.

Snape almost shoved the headmaster aside. "Of course you insolent boy! With all that you've done!"

Albus put a hand on Severus' shoulder and gave him a reprimanding look that had even Snape backing away. "Enough Severus. Now Harry, you won't be sacked and you know it."

Severus started to sputter in indignation and frustration but quickly shut up and stomped away from the infirmary in a swirl of black robes after a commanding look from the headmaster.

"Where were we?...Ah yes! You won't be sacked, as you say it, but I will have to suspend you for 2 weeks. You will be going back to the Dursleys until Dolores calms down and until you get your priorities in check. Is that understood Harry? Auror Moody will be accompanying you home. The wards have already been doubled so there won't be any problems. I suggest you go pack up and say a temporary goodbye to your friends. You depart tonight at 7."

Harry got up without saying a word (which Dumbledore thought strange; Harry always argued when it was a matter of going back to the Dursleys) and opened the door Snape had closed with a bang.

He had set foot outside when he froze for a moment, thinking about something. "Oh. Before I forget; you should really ask Snape to brew something more powerful than the Sleeping Draught. It seems as though I've developed a certain immunity to it. And he could ameliorate the flavor while you're at it; it tastes like shit." And with that he was gone, leaving Dumbledore and Pomfrey looking at each other worriedly.

Neither really noticed the heavy swearing as Poppy murmured weakly; "But it's the most potent draught there is for sleep..."

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Harry packed his things (although there wasn't much) under the curious and watchful eyes of his 3 other roommates, but he simply ignored their inquisitive glances.

“Hey mate! You’re not going away for good, aren’t you?” Ron asked nervously, fidgeting on his spot. Seamus and Neville looked apprehensive and held their breath to hear the answer.

Harry decided that a casual answer was better so he shrugged. “No. Just suspended until Umbridge calms herself down. 2 weeks I’ve been given.” He shrugged again for good measure when he noticed Ron shudder.

“Bullocks! Doesn’t Dumbledore have any pity? You have to go back to the Dursleys? Really?” the redhead asked with a grimace and a sympathetic look.

Harry shrugged a 3rd time. “I don’t really care right now. Any place without Umbridge is good enough for me. Now if you’ll excuse me, I have other things to do.” Harry excused himself and left for the kitchens.

Ron, Neville and Seamus looked at each other anxiously. “Blimey! I don’t like this at all! It won’t be the same without Harry here! Who’ll protect us if there’s an attack?” Ron said while gnawing at his lower lip.

Neville tried to look at the positive side with a nervous laugh. “Come on, guys! Don’t look so glum! Dumbledore’s here isn’t he?”

Seamus nodded, trying to follow Neville’s example. Ron frowned slightly but before he could open his mouth to reply, someone else beat him to it, surprising the 3 boys so much that they jumped from their respective bed.

“Dumbledore may be here, but he hasn’t done much in the last 6 years we’ve been here. Harry did almost everything by himself and Dumbledore merely watched and congratulated him.”

Ron put a hand on his chest and gave an annoyed glare at the newcomer, who sat beside him as if nothing was wrong.

“Merlin Hermione! Don’t do that again! You nearly gave me a heart attack!” the redhead whined loudly.

The girl shrugged and took out a bag of Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, plopping one in her mouth while replying with a dismissive shrug; "I'm right though. We all see Dumbledore as the greatest and all, but he hasn't done much in the past years to really help Harry. I mostly think he's the one responsible for Harry's sorrowfulness."

She had made her point, and the 3 boys stayed oddly contemplative, trying to remember any events where Dumbledore had *truly* helped Harry. Nothing really came in their minds.

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He tickled the pear when no one was looking and found himself with an armful of crying house-elf. "Master Harry Potter! Dobby heard! Dobby heard! Don't go away Mister Harry Potter sir! Hogwarts won't feel as safe without Master Harry Potter! Dobby can go see Master Dumbledore and tell him Master Harry Potter didn't do anything wrong! Dobby doesn't believe Master Harry Potter is evil! Harry Potter is good!"

Harry actually chuckled and stopped Dobby before he could do anything foolish. "Don't Dobby! My...relatives aren't the nicest but it will do me some good to get out of Hogwarts for a while. I'm accumulating stress here and my magic is getting out of control. I'll have some time to relax."

Dobby nodded in understanding but still blew his nose noisily on his sleeve. "Anything Master Harry Potter wishes, Dobby will obey!"

Harry patted the bald head of the elf and smiled. "Good. Now Dobby, could you prepare a big basket of food for me? Just shrink it if it's too big please, it would be of a great help."

Dobby bobbed his head up and down and disappeared with a loud *crack!*, only to reappear minutes later with not one, but 2 miniature baskets. Harry didn't complain and thanked the house-elf profusely, which resulted in Dobby crying in happiness.

Harry put the 2 small baskets in his pocket and put his father's cloak on when Dobby disappeared again.

Many times he had to pull over or change corridors because Dumbledore or any other teachers were coming his way. He mentally blessed the Marauder's Map and continued to trek towards Myrtle's lavatories with only one goal in head: go back to the Chamber of Secrets...and to his own secret.

Myrtle was too busy screaming her dead heart out to even notice the hissing and opening of the entrance. Harry let himself slide in the wide tunnel and with further hissing he was back in front of the surprisingly opened hidden stone wall.

A small smile lit his face when she smiled widely at him, waving and now walking towards him in greeting. "Harry! I didn't think you would come back so soon! Is there something wrong?"

The smile that previously lit her face transformed into a worried glance and she looked at him with deep concern when the courage he had found to smile went away. He sighed deeply and ran a hand through his hair, ruffling it even more.

"Well, the good news is that I've been able to escape the vigilance of the teachers to come here to see you. The bad news is that I'm going home tonight at 7."

She gasped softly and put a hand on his shoulders to make him look at her in the eyes. He felt nervous at the contact but didn't try to pry her hands off, remembering that he was (probably) the only person she had ever touched beside her (supposed) fathers and that she had to trust him a lot if she was actually concerned for his welfare.

"Are you being sent home just because you did the right thing?!" She actually looked scared of such an idea. She probably didn't want to be alone here anymore than she already had.

Harry scoffed. "Right or wrong, it all rings the same when it comes to the ministry. But to answer your question, no, I haven't been sacked from Hogwarts. But I'll have to stay 2 weeks at my *relatives*" he said the word with a great deal of disdain, "so don't worry I'll be back."

She still looked worried and bit her lower lips. She truly felt lost and useless right now. Harry sighed and decided that, why not? He would try to believe her.

He gave a soft stroke at her long hair and marveled at its silkiness, while she looked at his hand as if it was the most interesting thing in the world.

“Just don’t worry, Serena. I’ve got it all covered. Moody- the auror with the fake eye I told you about- is going to accompany me to the Dursley household and members of the Order will probably pry around the neighborhood once in a while. I’ll just stay away from Dudley and Vernon (he had told her about them earlier) and study a little until things calm down. Then I’ll use my father’s invisibility cloak to creep away and call the Knight Bus. I’ll have to cover my scar with my hair as best as I can but I can do it. I’ll go to Diagon Alley with the cloak on still to check up on some book.”

She eyed him curiously. “Go to Diagon Alley just to find a book? And why with your cloak?”

Harry grimaced. “Hogwarts school year is still in session. If I’m seen it’ll be a scandal in the Daily Prophet the next day. Especially where I’m going: Knockturn Alley.”

She gasped again and quickly stepped back. “Why would you want to go there?! This place helped ruin my father’s reputation even more!”

Harry gave her the wisp of a smile. “I know it’s scary, but I really need to find that book on Salazar Slytherin’s life story.”

She blinked and suddenly understood. “So you want to believe me then?”

Harry nodded when she looked relieved and radiant with happiness. “I do already believe in you, Serena. It’s the other’s version of the story I want to contradict.”

When he looked at her after that declaration, he was shocked to see tears falling down her eyes. She unsuccessfully tried to wipe them all

off on the long sleeve of her blood red blouse -medieval type, Harry noticed- but she laughed shakily when more trailed down her cheeks.

“Thank you. Thank you so much!” She seemed to lose her words and stuttered. “Look at me! I’m crying over the simple fact that you would do all of this for me!”

Harry smiled softly and closed his eyes, his hands going in his pockets. “It’s quite understandable.” He decided to change the subject to brighten their spirit.

“Did something happen while I was gone? You seemed awfully happy when I arrived.”

Her eyes lit up and all traces of tears disappeared. “You won’t believe what I found!” She gripped his right hand and ran to her chamber.

Harry had no choice but to follow and he was surprised to find a bump in her bed sheets. “What’cha got there?” he asked curiously.

She giggled and pulled the sheets aside to reveal an egg too big to fit in only one hand. It looked somewhat old and yellowed by time and had green spots of moss growing on it here and there.

Harry was stuck between feeling a deep sense of apprehension or disbelief. “Please don’t tell me what I think it is.”

She blinked at him and then swatted his shoulders playfully. “It depends on what you think it is. But if you think it’s a Basilisk egg, you’re right.”

Now Harry didn’t know what to say, he didn’t know if he had to be worried, mad or stay neutral. “Are you crazy?! And who did you come across this thing anyway?”

She ignored his outburst wisely, knowing he had had a nasty experience with the previous one. “Well, I was bored this morning – my magic is only starting to reawaken inside of me- so I decided to inspect the changes in the outer chamber. I was really sad about the previous guardian of the Chamber of Secrets’ fate so I only wanted to see in what he had been living in the past thousand years. I was so

surprised to find this very egg just lying there, waiting to be picked up! I guess my previous Basilisk somehow knew it couldn't help but turn dark and wanted to leave something familiar for me behind. But it's just a wild guess."

Harry sighed deeply and ran a hand through his wild hair. "There was only one Basilisk, yes? So how come it has been able to lay an egg? And why do you think it'll still hatch after all these years?"

She smiled and put the warm sheet over the egg to cover it back again. "Well, some species of snakes can be asexual if needed. I admit it's rare for a Basilisk to lay an egg but I guess this one truly felt it was a necessity. As for the time it has been there, it's my guess that the environment just kept it in a stasis. Father Salazar told me he had bought the previous one when it wasn't yet hatched, and preserved in a stasis by means of magic. I'll just have to keep it warm and it'll eventually hatch, though I don't have any idea of when that will happen."

Harry nodded and decided that if she had perfect control over the first one, there weren't a lot of chances that the second wouldn't listen to her. It still felt weird to hear her call her fathers Salazar and Godric, but he would remediate that problem in Knockturn Alley, he hoped. "Oh, before I forget." He took out 2 minuscule baskets from his pockets and gave them to her.

She looked at them with interest, then back at him questioningly. "What are those for? And why have they been shrunk?"

Harry smiled and started; "I know you must surely be hungry by now. I'm sorry I didn't think of it sooner. I asked a close friend, a house-elf, to make those. I had only asked him one but I guess he overdid it a little. But since I'm going away for 2 weeks it's okay. You know the long tables we eat at in the Great Hall?"

She nodded for him to continue. "Yes, they're surely the same the students used a thousand years ago since they're preserved by the school's magic."

"Well, those 2 baskets are the equivalent of a whole table full of food."

Serena's eyes widened. 'Dear God! They must be huge!' But she smiled in apology and politely refused. "You keep them, Harry. I thank you for your consideration, it was nice of you to think about me so much, but I've already eaten."

Harry looked shocked. "You went out of the Chamber of Secrets?"

She giggled and shook her head negatively. "No. I have everything I need here. This room had been built especially for the emergencies and daddy Godric charmed the room so it could provide me for everything I might need, of course it was father Salazar who helped him enter" she specified. "And if something is missing, I'll just use my magic to get it when it'll be fully back."

Harry was happy that she wouldn't be missing anything while he was gone and sighed in relief. "Okay then. I'll keep the baskets. It's not like the Dursleys are spoiling me anyway."

She nodded and they lapsed in a comfortable silence, reveling in each other's presence. "It's beginning to be late. I should return to the 'world of the living' if I don't want to be fed Veritaserum or be assaulted by Snape with his damn occlumency. I have enough troubles as it is with Voldemort, I don't want him prying into my head either." He said half-jokingly, yet he truly didn't want to go but knew he had no choice.

He began to step away when she stopped him with a hand on his shoulder. "Harry, when you come back I'll teach you Occlumency and Legilimency," she said softly, her decision made.

He looked at her with wide eyes and his mouth slightly agape. "You'll what? You know Occlumency? But it's a dark art!"

She nodded and he now noticed how much she seemed tired and much aware of the situation. He hadn't been the only one to live a tough life and he answered his own question. "Of course. You needed to know how to defend yourself."

She smiled sadly. "Exactly. Fathers taught me everything I know, and then some. I've practically read ALL the books in the library plus the darkest books. I didn't have anything else to do in that time. But I'm

sure new books came out with the time and the new incantations must surely be different from mine. We'll see to it in 2 weeks. You better hurry before they get worried. I just want you to stay calm during that time, and to learn how to meditate and relax your mind. It's a pretty good exercise to begin with when you want to learn the art of blocking your mind. So it's your homework!" she said playfully, the mood brightening a little in the damp room.

Harry chuckled and nodded, for once really intending on doing what someone told him to do. If she had been Snape he wouldn't have tried anything. "Okay, *professor!*" He saluted, and with one last smile aimed at her he proceeded out the Chamber of Secrets, casting a *Wingardium Leviosa* on himself to get up the gigantic pipe that was the entrance.

As soon as he was back in the entrance hall, he was assaulted by a bunch of angry and worried teachers and a sneering Umbridge, looking like she had just lost a match (Harry hadn't been sacked after all...Harry 1- Umbridge 0!).

"Harry Potter! Where were you?! We've been waiting for you for almost 30 minutes now!!!" Minerva McGonagall grounded out with a thin set of lips.

Luckily for Harry, his Head of House had spoken up before the potions master so Severus kept his mouth shut. The students present were all watching the scene apprehensively, wondering if it was a good thing or a bad thing that Harry was going away. His attitude had scared them shitless, yes, but he had helped to protect the school all these years.

Malfoy and his Slytherin cronies were watching in a far corner with smirks on their faces and Harry only smirked back, angering the blonde boy with his boldness. After all, the green eyed boy knew something Malfoy didn't.

And Dumbledore had said he was to go back to the Dursleys, but he hadn't specified

if he was supposed to stay there at all times or not. He would go to Diagon Alley, whether they liked it or not (not that he would tell them anyway).

Harry glanced at his belongings now being reduced in size by an angry looking Moody. Harry shrugged it off. Moody was always moody. He chuckled mentally at his little joke yet his subconscious answered McGonagall's question less it looked suspicious. "I wanted to walk around Hogwarts for a while to clear my mind is all, professor McGonagall."

The Gryffindor Head of House sighed and brushed the incident aside and Albus gave him a sad look. Harry concentrated on staying neutral but he was mentally cheering. 'Take that! They completely believed my little lie! I'm getting quite good at this.'

To fake something, of course, was one of Harry's main ability he had developed after all these years. His little Slytherin side liked to come out once in a while.

"Come on, Potter! I haven't got all day! We're already late!" barked Moody, his fake magical eye spinning in its socket to watch the students behind him. Hermione ran to him and hugged him, bawling her eyes out and Snape's snort made her come out of her little bout of craziness.

She wiped her eyes on a handkerchief and backed away. "Don't worry Harry! The 2 weeks will pass rapidly and you'll be back here in no time!"

Ron nodded and patted Harry's shoulder awkwardly. "Yeah mate! Hogwarts won't be the same without you. You be careful and write to us daily okay? I'll pound those muggle relatives of yours into the ground if they try something!" Ron cracked his knuckles in emphasis, a smirk on his face.

"Of course Ron," Harry answered patiently.

'To be careful...' Harry almost snorted. He was only thinking about going to Knockturn Alley. Oh the irony!

He finally turned around to grip his precious Firebolt (Harry 2-Umbridge 0!) and looked just in time at professor Snape to see him rolling his eyes at Hermione and Ron with a look of disgust etched on his pale face. He simply ignored the potions teacher and mounted his broom, following Moody out of Hogwarts' ground limits where they would take -Harry shuddered- a Portkey.

"I'll see you soon, Serena. Be careful." Harry whispered to the wind.

"What was that, Potter?"

Harry blinked at the grouchy auror and shook his head. "Nothing."

Back in the Chamber of Secrets, a silver haired girl was staring at a half-covered egg while petting it gently. "Things will be fine Harry. *You* be careful."

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Chapter 11: Within two weeks...

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His return had been rather odd. Moody had once again scared Vernon to hell and back again and gone back to Hogwarts with a simple grunted "Behave" to Harry. Luckily it had been dark outside so nobody had seen the green eyes darken in a wicked gleam.

As soon as Moody had disappeared in the sky the boy was shoved inside the house and locked in Dudley's second bedroom with an enraged cry from the huge man. "IT WASN'T ENOUGH TO HAVE HIM TEINT OUR HOUSE IN THE SUMMER! NOW HE'S GOING TO HAVE TO STAY HERE FOR TWO WHOLE WEEKS! FREAK!"

Harry, from his sitting position on the floor, growled low and sneered, speaking loud enough for Vernon, Petunia and Dudley to hear. "It's not as if I wanted to come back here willingly!"

The Boy-Who-Lived heard hurried shuffling behind the bedroom door but, as surprising as it sounds, Vernon didn't bother to enter and give him one of his punishments. "You dare speak back to me, Freak! Oh, how I long for the day when you turn seventeen! (The age for a wizard to perform legal magic and be an adult). I'll kick you out of the house with a smile!" Vernon said gleefully from behind the door.

"You won't have to kick me out, Vernon! I'll show myself out as soon as midnight sounds!" Harry grunted back, his fist tightening around his wand: Holly and Phoenix feather, 13 inches.

Vernon gave a harsh bark of laughter and Harry heard the man walking away, the floorboards of the hallway creaking painfully under each of his steps. "It's the first time we're both agreeing on the same thing, boy!"

Harry kept silent and hid his wand and cloak, along with his diminished trunk, under the loose floorboard he had discovered years ago. He had decided to leave Hedwig in the owlery so he didn't have to worry about her.

Harry decided to wait all week before going to Diagon Alley, at least until Vernon forgot about him being in the house. He had learned to stay quiet and sneak around at night; he knew each creaking floorboard and how to avoid them. And since he had two baskets full of food the only reason he would have to get out is to go to the bathroom.

He took out a quill that automatically regained its original size, some ink and a bunch of parchments and books. "It was a good thing to spell this stuff to go back to their normal sizes when I touched them. Dobby must've put the same spell on the food. I hate this stupid underage wizard magic law!" he muttered discontentedly.

"Oh well, might as well do the best of it. I have a lot of homework and study to do." Mindless of the time it was, Harry set off to do his homework.

"This is going to be a long week..."

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Back at Hogwarts, things were far from being peaceful; Umbridge was always sporting that wide smile and kept giving points to the Slytherin students while taking a huge amount off the Gryffindors for almost no valid reason.

Ron liked to call it her 'little power trip' since Harry was gone and nobody couldn't do anything about it.

She seemed to gain more confidence and power as days went by; Remus obviously kept his distance from her since he was considered a dark creature. That, and the full moon was coming in a couple of days.

The werewolf in him often had the urge to rip the infernal woman's throat to shreds just for the fun of it and it almost made Remus chuckle if it hadn't been such a serious situation. He would be sent to his death, yet he would remain a hero to Hogwarts. Stupid curse...

Snape was taking advantage of the fact that Potter was away to mock the boy and make his Slytherin students laugh during potions class,

much to the dismay of Ron, Hermione and every other Gryffindors qualified by the NEWTs in the class.

However, down in the bowel of the castle, lower even than Snape's dungeons, things were very different. There, alone in the Chamber of Secrets, a girl was meditating.

Tendrils of magic kept flowing around her as she slowly regained her unusual power. A blue eye opened and glanced furtively at the magically heated egg, magic she had regained.

Satisfied with the egg's condition, she closed her blue eye and continued to relax her mind, all the while thinking about a certain green eyed boy. Unknown to her, the old yellowed egg shook for a mere second before going back to its normal unmoving state.

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Oh, how he loved his father's cloak! Harry waited patiently for the Dursleys to go to work and for Dudley to go to school and he slipped it on carefully so it covered every inch of his body. Getting out by the backyard to not raise suspicions by the front door opening alone, he walked around the house and started his trek down Privet Drive.

As he thought, Mundungus "Dung" Fletcher was prowling around the house, trying his best not to look suspicious. Harry almost snorted; Dung always looked shady, and he certainly wasn't the best person to check on the Boy-Who-Lived since the guy's daily activities were more than doubtful.

Harry walked beside an inattentive Dung and continued swiftly down the street and towards another. After walking for about 20 minutes, he stopped near an alleyway and finally lifted his wand above his head.

On cue, the Knight Bus appeared with a loud *Bang!* And Harry almost lost his footing. Stan showed up, as usual, but the man frowned when he saw no one waiting to take the bus. "Stupid pranksters," he muttered angrily, "I hate it when they do that!"

He told the conductor to move along towards the next stop with a grumble and, seconds later, there wasn't any trace left of the magical bus having been there.

An hour later it reappeared in front of an old pub. A few passengers got off and the still invisible Harry was one of them. His mood had changed from energetic to disgruntled during the trip.

He was lucky to have his father's cloak because his hair probably was a total mess and he was just glad not to have been sick in the bus. The darned thing seemed only to jerk more as the years went by. Still, he had left 2 galleons near where Stan was sitting. It must've been the noble and rightful Gryffindor in him that made him do that.

Tom was scrubbing his counter when Harry slipped inside the Leaky Cauldron at the same time as the few Knight Bus passengers who had gotten off at the same time as him, and he slipped as easily in Diagon Alley using the same strategy.

He quickly set off towards Knockturn Alley, walking near the shops so he wouldn't be pushed around. Still, there were less people walking around than when it was the start of the school year.

He found the entrance of Knockturn Alley and, with a quick intake of breath, he set off to find the library he was looking for. Dark witches and wizards were making suspicious transactions in the dimly lit alleys and he had to duck a few times when two grouchy wizards started to bicker and throw curses at each other.

With all that he faced, Harry was no longer scared of this place and could even have showed them a thing or two. Unfortunately he couldn't use his magic outside of Hogwarts, less he wanted the ministry to follow his magic trail; and this wasn't the best of places for the popular Boy-Who-Lived to be found.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he finally found the damned library "Books of the Dark World" and stopped to rake his nerves and rearrange himself to look presentable. He tamed his dark hair with Dudley's hair gel (and shuddered thinking about Snape's hair) and made sure his scar was covered completely, afterwards checking if the black cloak he was wearing was straight and clean.

He slapped a full-on sneer that clearly said "Don't mess with me or else!" on his face and straightened his back to look taller and more imposing just like he had seen Malfoy senior and Snape do with so much ease (though it looked more as if they had something stuck up their ass).

He made sure that no one was looking when he slipped the invisibility cloak off and folded it neatly under his arm. There was no one to welcome him when he entered so Harry helped himself up and immediately set off to find the book he was looking for.

The place was creepy; it was crammed with books that had gathered at least 10 years worth of dust and spider webs. He searched and searched for it, but he didn't find the book he was looking for...and that was starting to irritate him.

He was dusting yet another book when a hand closed around his shoulder. Harry whirled around and his wand was now pointed at the person's throat, a valuable self-defense instinct.

The old man almost tripped backwards in fright at having a wand pointed at his throat and waited for his new customer to put it away. He just used these few seconds to quickly study the young man; he wasn't very tall but held himself with pride and confidence, along with an air of defiance.

The librarian concluded he was from a wealthy family and noted to himself not to take this customer by surprise next time less he wanted to get hexed to oblivion. "Awfully good reflexes, I must say."

Harry blinked and sneered, putting away his wand. He knew he couldn't use it, but nobody knew that.

"Don't do that ever again, old man." Harry found it easy to talk like this, as if he truly was evil; he just had to think about everything that had happened to him since he was born and the words were flowing out of his mouth effortlessly.

The old man nodded and asked what he was searching for. "I may be of some help, since you've taken on the task of dusting all my books."

Harry straightened his back and glared even more and the half-shaved, smelly old librarian hurriedly bowed his head in respect. "If you had shown up earlier I wouldn't have had to check every damn book one by one, you fool. But now that you're here you'll help me."

Harry tried to keep his voice as grave and smooth as possible. "I'm searching for a particular book, a very *rare* book." The boy smirked darkly for emphasis and the old man beside him smirked back, showing his yellowed teeth.

"That I can help you with, sir! Rare books are my specialty!"

Harry decided to play with the old man and took an air of indifference, looking at his fingernails. "I very much doubt it. I searched everywhere for this book but you don't see it in my hands now, do you? I would be ready to pay the price to have such an item in my collection."

The man first looked indignant when he heard Harry's remark but he quickly became more interested when the words 'pay the price' popped up. He bowed even more. "And what would that book be, most magnificent wizard?"

Harry mentally rolled his eyes. 'What a kiss ass!' He raised an eyebrow at the man's flattery and smiled the darkest and most dangerous of smiles, making the old man unconsciously hold his breath. His customer's green eyes seemed to shine with unknown power.

"I want Salazar Slytherin's book, the one that tells of his life. And I don't want no cheap copy of it; I. Want. The. Original. Version...written by the man himself." Harry punctuated his phrase so that old man understood every word coming out of his mouth and the librarian paled slightly. This wasn't just a game anymore; this highly unusual customer meant serious business.

The smelly man looked around quickly and motioned for Harry to follow him with a sign of his hand. They walked behind the counter and into the backstore. There, the dust was even thicker yet they passed by each and every book to finally stop at the far end where a

small secured chest stood, the only thing completely devoid of dust in the entire store.

It was a vivid green, a very familiar green, and painted snakes adorned the chest, though they looked more than real.

"The book is in there, one of a kind, it is." The dark librarian said with a glint of awe in his eyes when he looked at the chest. "But nobody has ever been able to open the trunk. 'Tis heavily warded and repels every unlocking charms known to wizard. Every time it's been sold it's been brought back because the owner couldn't open it and thought of it as a hoax. But 'tis no joke." The old man said seriously with a raspy voice.

Harry was beginning to grow tired of waiting and he huffed loudly. "How much do you want for it old man? I don't have all day!"

The librarian looked at him suspiciously. " 'Tis 200 galleons. You can pay all of this?"

200 galleons was indeed a big amount of money; no wonder why the man wanted to make sure he wouldn't be duped.

Harry sneered. "Just bring the damn thing in the front and I'll do the rest." Then, the green eyed boy stalked out of the backstore and waited for the librarian to bring him his due.

The small chest was put down on the counter and the dark man's eyes widened when a thick pouch of money was almost thrown carelessly on the counter in front of him. With shaky hands he opened it and he smiled a maniacal smile. "M'pleasure to do business with you! Hope to see you soon!"

Harry took the chest and held it securely within his grasp, not even bothering to say goodbye.

He went back 'home' in the same fashion he came and lucky for him, the Dursleys still weren't back from work and Dudley from school. He glanced quickly at the clock in the living room and almost gaped at the time it was; he had departed at nine in the morning and it was

now four in the afternoon! He had spent almost four hours in Knockturn Alley!

He ran up the stairs and took a quick shower to get the greasy gel out of his mop of hair and locked himself in his bedroom to be left alone when the Dursleys would come back. It was now time to discover the mystery of the locked trunk.

It was proving to be quite the problem at first since he couldn't use his magic to try to open it. Then again, the old man had warned him that unlocking spells didn't work against it.

No. Salazar Slytherin had been known for his intelligence and cunningness, it was a Slytherin trait even now. The chest had to open some other way. Salazar had probably made sure that only a true Slytherin would be able to open it. "THAT'S IT!" Harry exclaimed loudly in enlightenment.

He examined the painting on the chest closely and traced the snakes lightly with his fingers. "This must be it..." He concentrated and hissed lowly; "*Open.*"

The little painted snakes suddenly coiled around on the smooth green surface and Harry quickly took his fingers off since a snake hissed at him. There was a small sound of a lock opening and the snakes went back to their previous unmoving state.

Harry stared. He had succeeded where everyone else had failed. "HA! Take that Lucius Malfoy!" Harry muttered happily, relieve that such an artifact was now in his possession instead of in Malfoy's or even Voldemort's.

The Boy-Who-Lived let out a bark of laughter when he noticed the odd writing on the cover and again thought of Malfoy who wouldn't even have been able to read it; it was written in a clear and flourish handwriting of this period of time but there was a twist. It was written in Parseltongue.

Harry had to concentrate more to read the language since he was only used to speak it. It was weird to see snake language usually

hissed written down and yet Harry couldn't say it was impossible since he had never even tried.

"Journal of Salazar Slytherin" Harry read out loud when he was able to figure out how to read the title properly. He opened the book and before he started to read the first page, he noticed a small note on the back of the cover.

"If you read this then I am dead and have given this book to someone trustworthy in Knockturn Alley-" Harry snorted That someone was dead because now there wasn't anybody trustworthy in Knockturn Alley.

He passed over that detail and continued to decipher the message. *"- so that this book won't fall into the wrong hands. My dear daughter, when you read this I hope you will have found some happiness and forgiven us for not being able to take care of you until the end. Find the keys and save your legacy. Salazar Slytherin."*

Harry did a double check but there wasn't anything else written down in the message. At least, 'My dear daughter' was proof that Salazar had an unknown direct heir and the 'forgiven us' meant that Salazar hadn't been alone to raise her.

Harry's suspicions were now completely erased. Serenity had told the complete truth and now he would know the whole story. Something bothered the green eyed boy, though. That last part had been too mysterious and had to have a hidden meaning, yet it didn't make any sense.

"Find the keys and save your legacy? What the heck is that supposed to mean?" Harry asked himself, but try as he may nothing came to mind. He shrugged it off and decided to wait for Serena to read it; maybe she would know the meaning of this last phrase.

"Monday, October 30th, Red Moon"

Our previous experiments being total failures, we didn't expect this one to succeed above all our expectations. We will continue to monitor the project 'Blood Mix' closely and mark down its progress..."

Harry read and read, sadden by what they had first thought about her: an experimentation, and nothing else. But as he read, he noticed that the man talked about her with more familiarity as she grew.

"Saturday, July 30th, Blue Moon

She is now a month old and no longer seems to be an experiment for us. Godric insists on giving her the name Serenity because she is the most peaceful baby he has ever come across. He says that he feels his whole self unwind when he is close to her; personally I think he has breathed in too many chemical products from my potions office..."

Harry rolled his eyes. Pure Slytherin comment. There was an entry for each week and the reading only became more interesting as his eyes scrolled the pages of the journal.

"Tuesday, May 21st, Green Moon

Our little girl is growing. Godric is spoiling her way too much but I guess I am too, since she cannot go outside. She surprised us today with an early display of magic by levitating a vase that was going to fall on her. She'll be powerful beyond our wildest expectations, and it is sometimes scaring me. Too bad no one would accept her as she is a creation. Godric also had very good news; he found two other witches to help us make our second project come true. Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff accepted, no questions asked, to help us finance the magic school we wanted to create so much. Godric showed the blueprints of Hogwarts to Serena. I think she memorized the whole thing by heart the first day..."

And it went on and on. Harry was so engrossed in the story that he completely forgot to eat. Vernon didn't even bother to tell him to get out of the bedroom so he must've completely forgotten that Harry was even there by now.

The journal was somewhat detailed, but Salazar never truly mentioned clearly what kind of power Serena possessed and what kind of magic she was best at. There weren't any magic spells written down, probably because if the book fell into wrong hands the person wouldn't be able to hurt anyone with it.

So Harry spent part of the night reading about what kind of life Slytherin led, until his eyes dropped and forced him to stop, much to his displeasure. He went to bed and fell asleep soundly, the green leather book held tightly in his arms.

The boy spent the rest of his second week reading, stopping only to go to the bathroom, eat or sleep; not even replying to the owls his friends sent him. The book not only talked about Serena, but also of Salazar and Godric's lives. Their first day in Hogwarts or the day when Salazar went to Knockturn Alley to get the egg. The ministry butting in his business even more as days passed by.

As Friday came, Harry was now keen on going back to the castle, if only to see *her*. She was Hogwarts' secret, and she now was his as well. He would not force her to come out. He would stay with her and learn even more about her. They probably knew things the other didn't and that excited him, even more than Hermione in front of a new encyclopedia she didn't read yet.

Umbridge could do anything she wished to try to break him, she would not succeed. Maybe before, but not now. Never. Harry now had a strong will to live, if only for *her*, but still a spark in him, greater than when he learned he was a wizard, had lit up.

He held his head in confidence and defiance when the time came for an auror from the Order to pick him up. He would not be toyed with anymore; he would not bend to their will.

House points meant nothing to him any longer. He knew the truth; Gryffindor and Slytherin were allies, if only their ancient spirits and not in this time.

A sparkle lit in his vivid green eyes, a sparkle that would've given Dumbledore's a run for his money.

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Chapter 12: Ssssurrprissse

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Auror Moody opened the great doors for him and Harry entered Hogwarts with his head held high.

Dumbledore was waiting in front of the entrance stairway, flocked by professor McGonagall, Snape and Lupin. Umbridge was nowhere to be seen, to Harry's gratefulness.

Before Dumbledore could even utter a word, Remus was on the boy and hugging him senseless. "I was so worried, Harry! You didn't reply any of the letters we sent you yet the wards weren't down!"

Harry stood stiff; being in Moony's embrace made him remember the day when Sirius fell into the Veil and said werewolf was holding him forcefully away.

"Oh, for Merlin's sake, Lupin! Stop worshipping the boy! He was serving his well-deserved punishment and you just cuddle him as if nothing had ever happened!" The potions master snapped angrily to the werewolf, who seemed to hesitate for a second and then backed away reluctantly from Harry, not looking at the boy.

The headmaster lifted a hand to make Severus stop and he started; "We were indeed worried, Harry. You should have replied to our letters. May I ask why you did not?" Albus looked closely at Harry Potter but he saw nothing in the totally relaxed and confident green eyes of the boy that could've compromised or reveal anything.

Everyone was waiting for an answer and Harry bit his tongue so he wouldn't insult them as they stared unabashedly at him, and glared in Snape's direction as a warning not to try anything like last time. "I had more important things to do than answering some letters that always ask the same questions. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm tired and would like to go to bed."

Snape looked outraged. "Why you impertinent, insolent little-!"

And again Albus stopped his ranting with a motion of his hand. Snape huffed frustratingly and stalked away to his dungeons, his cloak billowing behind him.

Minerva, who had been silent during the whole encounter, shook her head in anguish. "Merlin, I don't know what to do with him anymore. What would James and Lily- God bless their soul- say if they saw him act like this?"

Remus gulped loudly when he heard Minerva mutter those words and the very thought of it made him run away to his own chambers, lest he wanted to make a fool of himself and start crying.

Minerva covered her mouth a little too late; Remus was already gone and she gave Albus an apologizing glance. "I shouldn't have said that. But we are indeed losing him, Albus" she finished reluctantly, fear laced in her voice as she moved to walk away. Albus merely nodded to her, his old eyes still looking where Harry had gone. Minerva sighed and went back to her rooms.

Albus walked to his office slowly, as if time had suddenly caught on with him. "Smarties." The statue jumped aside when it heard the password and Albus sat on his cushioned chair, plopping not one, but two of his famous Lemon Drops in his mouth. The effect of the calming potion laced within them made him sigh in relief and he let himself completely relax and lean back in the chair.

"What should I do? I don't know anymore. We truly are losing him. I can sense so much anger when he looks at me, the same look Tom often gave me when he was a student here..."

Silence stretched in the almost deserted office.

"Perhaps you manipulated him too much? It certainly didn't help. I should've sorted him in Slytherin as I first intended. I knew it."

Albus looked at his upper bookshelf to find the Sorting Hat who was deep in thought. The headmaster didn't reply, though, and Fawkes didn't pay any attention as his burning day was approaching.

But what the Sorting Hat had said was right: he had indeed gone too far and used Harry's fate in him to manipulate the boy. Now, most of the people he loved or deeply cared about and cared about Harry were either dead or in constant danger. No wonder the boy kept his distance from the others and Dumbledore himself.

"Oh how I wish I could turn back time..." The old headmaster whispered to himself.

The only response he got was Harry's mocking voice in his head; 'It's a little too late for that, isn't it, headmaster?'

Albus shuddered just thinking about tomorrow: Umbridge would be waiting for Harry and there was little he could do now. His power over Hogwarts had diminished over the past two weeks. The ministry was getting stronger and Umbridge with it.

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Needless to say, Harry's roommates weren't sleeping when said boy got into bed. Ron all but jumped on him. "HARRY! YOU'RE BACK!"

Harry almost choked when Ron hit him in the back in a friendly gesture. Seamus and Neville weren't far behind and patted Harry too, a little too eagerly as if they were afraid he wasn't real.

"And not a moment too soon, mate! Umbridge was starting to make everyone nervous. Look at poor Neville here!" Seamus pointed at an indignant Neville.

"Hey! Seamus! That's not funny! I swear than viper can hear anything everywhere..." The poor boy muttered under his breath while glancing sideways nervously.

Harry rolled his eyes and got into bed. "Just ignore her, then. If we don't retaliate she won't be able to do anything to us. Now if you'll excuse me, I'm rather sleepy. It's been a long week."

The three boys looked at each other uncertainly, then at the now sleeping Boy-Who-Lived. "Ignore her?" Neville whispered, "Merlin only knows how much we tried!"

Seamus nodded fervently while Ron replied: "Harry will know what we meant soon enough. It'll be difficult to ignore her when she holds so much power against us. If we ignore her then she just takes house points off and insults us even more so we won't have any choice but to reply!"

Silence met his statement. Seamus and Neville couldn't find anything else to say. And so, the three boys went to bed, apprehensive about what tomorrow would bring.

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Harry was wide awake and sitting in the back of Flitwick's classroom, listening to the small teacher talking about some charming spell and its effects against certain magical creatures.

He cast a cold glare towards the Slytherins students who were looking at him with superior smirks and they soon looked away when Flitwick rasped his throat at them. The Boy-Who-Lived soon started his relaxation technique as the teacher kept talking, his subconscious listening to the class and taking notes even if his mind wasn't there.

No, his mind was elsewhere: it was replaying the morning's event, when he first showed up at breakfast. He internally shuddered by just thinking about it. It wasn't a shudder of fear, far from it; more like disgust combined with pure unadulterated anger.

His scar pricked and Harry willed himself to relax as much as he could less he wanted his magic to go haywire again. No, he didn't want to live another experience like this morning.

Flashback

Gossip was going well, as usual, in the Great Hall. Only, when Harry walked in, every student instantly quieted and opted to stare at him. Those stares unnerved him, they irked him to no end and it only took one twitch of his eye in their direction to make them turn away and stare at their breakfast instead.

Hermione was waiting for Harry and Ron at their usual place and the girl greeted Harry happily, relieved of his return. However, before

Harry could join Ron and sit down, Umbridge's squeaky voice cut the silence in half. "Why Harry! How nice of you to join us!" she said with a sickly sweet voice that almost made the Boy-Who-Lived grit his teeth.

Harry chose to follow his own example and ignored her, sitting down and helping himself to a buttered toast.

From her place at the staff table, Umbridge did grit her teeth and fisted her hands under the table. The teachers ignored her and if one looked closely enough, they would've seen Minerva and Albus smirk in pride in their cup of tea, for Harry hadn't replied to the witch.

'The little! He has the nerve to ignore me!' Umbridge thought while mentally fuming. She hummed and plastered the biggest and scariest fake smile anyone had ever seen. The teachers went on alert mode but she hadn't done anything...yet.

The High Inquisitor pressed the matter, forcing Harry to reply. "So Harry, I hope you've learned your lesson! How was it, to your family's house during the past two weeks? I bet they were really disappointed at you! Where you punished?" She asked eagerly with no sense of privacy at all.

Snape sneered in disgust at the word 'family' and Dumbledore was about to interfere when Harry beat him to it. "Oh, you know, they're not really my family. I think they even forgot I was in the house after a couple of days. But it doesn't matter; I learned pretty interesting stuff during those two weeks. And you shouldn't worry; I won't try to 'kill you' again." Harry finished sarcastically.

"YOUR FAMILY DIDN'T PUNISH YOU!?, you still have the cheek to reply to me! They wouldn't do anything to their precious Boy-Who-Lived now, wouldn't they?"

Everyone winced visibly as she yelled like an outraged banshee. Harry lifted an eyebrow mockingly. "I told you they weren't my real family. And anyway, you're the one who pressed me for an answer."

The Gryffindors beside him nodded their assent but didn't dare talk, and Umbridge looked at a loss of words and on the verge of

exploding. "20 POINTS OFF GRYFFINDOR!" she shouted, not having anything better to reply.

Harry's friends were about to retort when professor McGonagall's voice rang calmly throughout the room. "And 20 points to Gryffindor for answering a question."

Umbridge opened her mouth to snap at the proud looking Minerva but Albus's glance proved effective once again. "Let's not abuse the use of House points now, Dolores. And Harry merely answered the question you pressed on him."

The viper never looked so mad and Seamus could've sworn he saw smoke coming out of her ears. Yet, Umbridge had one last thing to say, regardless of the people around her. She pointed a finger at Harry, her face almost red in embarrassment and rage. "You better be careful, Mister Potter! I'll be on the lookout for you! One wrong move and I'll know! And I'll follow you myself if this is what it takes!" she said threateningly.

Harry wiped his mouth with a napkin and got up slowly, his calm attitude in this situation earning him some glances of admiration. "Do what you want." Harry addressed her loudly, then turned around "you witch" he finished in a mutter under his breath.

He then spoke to his classmates: "You guys, I'm headed to Flitwick's class. I'll see you around." He didn't wait for their nods and walked out of the Great Hall, aware of the eyes following him out and knowing that Ron and Hermione weren't far behind.

End Flashback

Harry leaned his head on his hand and shuddered again at the memory. 'If that happens again I won't ever eat in the Great Hall again. I'm sure Serena would love to have some company...And I still have to give her Slytherin's diary.'

As the class came to an end, Harry left with his chatting friends. But he wasn't listening; he was trying to find a way or time to go to the Chamber of Secrets that wouldn't make the others suspicious about his absence.

Tough thing to do: he disappeared for only a couple of hours and the whole school was nearly in hysterics. Imagine going to the Chamber for an undetermined amount of time!

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It was well into the night when Harry woke up and put his school robes under his invisibility cloak. The portrait of the Fat Lady opened and she slept on. Harry was proud of his silencing spell: he was now strong enough to use the spell only once to cover the entire Gryffindor dormitories and Common Room in general.

He walked silently towards Myrtle's lavatories, very aware of Snape and Umbridge's presence in the corridors thanks to the Marauder's Map. He barely evaded Filch and Mrs. Norris and ran to the entrance before anyone could be suspicious: Mrs. Norris did have a great sense of smell, being a cat and all.

He found himself once again in front of the second entrance, the one that would lead him to the main chamber. He hissed at it to make it open and gaped once he saw the other side: it was no longer damp and humid, quite the contrary. Rows of fire lit torches bordered every wall and there were no more leaks of water on the stone pathway to the statue of Salazar's grandfather. It was quite agreeable and Harry vaguely wondered how she had been able to do all of this in two weeks.

He was about to cast Alohomora on the closed wall leading to Serena's room when the mouth of the statue suddenly opened without reason and out came...Harry gasped and closed his eyes tightly, leaning on the wall as a reflex. His heart was beating rapidly against his ribcage and he held his breath as he heard the new voice.

"Who goes there, on my mistress' territory? A human? Impossible!" The basilisk, although still very young, a baby, really, was already starting to look and sound imposing as he was outraged to find another wizard's presence in his lair, one that wasn't his mistress; and this wasn't good news.

He heard more than saw that the angry snake was slithering towards him and in a desperate attempt to stall it he put his hands in front of him: *"WAIT! I am a friend of your misstresss!"*

The Basilisk made a surprised hiss and stopped momentarily. *"You sspeak! But how do I know if you sspeak the truth? My predecesssor was decceived by this very trickery! I know! I am no fool!"*

The Basilisk gained in on Harry who tried his luck one last time, fear laced in his voice as he dared not injure the snake with a spell. *"Pleassse Jusst listen to what I have to sssay!"*

As the Basilisk was about to bite him, Harry tumbled backwards and fell on his rear when the entrance to Serena's room opened without notice. "What's all this commotion?..."

A very sleepy girl, still in her nightwear and rubbing her eyes, was suddenly surprised speechless when she opened the 'door' only to have Harry tumble backwards in front of her, her Basilisk poised to strike the poor boy.

"Ssstop He iss my friend!" was the first thing that got out of her mouth when the shock passed away.

The Basilisk stopped without asking any questions and slithered to its mistress, small enough (for now) for Serena to be able to support the added weight on her shoulders and arms. She petted the scaly head reassuringly and gave an apologizing glance to Harry. "I'm sorry you two had to meet this way. The Basilisk has all the memories of the previous one so it's more wary of its surroundings. He's very protective of me, as was the other, but it won't be of any danger to you once I explain the situation to him."

Harry gave her a shaky smile; he was still trying to get his emotions back in check. "Hum, then please do. I'll wait for you to finish, take your time."

Serena chuckled and got into bed where the snake nestled in the still warm bed sheets. Harry could hear pieces of the conversation and she motioned for him to come, that there wasn't any more danger.

"Huh, I noticccced you look at it directly...Aren't you afraid it'll kill you, albeit unintentionally?" Though Harry was unaware of it, he spoke in Parseltongue. He was also looking elsewhere, like the walls and ceiling, for example.

The rare snake hissed his outrage but the silver haired girl calmed it down by telling it that Harry hadn't meant that as an insult. *"No, I am not sscared, and neither should you be. He iss sstill young and his sstare will only petrify if need be. But assss hiss mistress I am immune to this, assss well assss the killing ability his eyess will develop in a few months. I asked Ssalazar to sspare you, and only you, and grant you accessss to the Chamber of Ssecretss. Do not worry, I have utmosst trust in him."* Serena finished with a gentle smile towards her familiar.

Harry hesitantly looked at the Basilisk and the snake eyed him back almost curiously.

"Hum...Okay. But him? Ssalazar?"

The snake let out a series of hisses and it took Harry a few seconds to recognize them as being snake laughter. *"I like this ssnake-child, mistress! He iss amussing!"*

The Basilisk turned in the direction of Harry after he made his mistress giggle. *"Ssnake-child, I am indeed what you humanssss call a 'boy', because I preferred it that way. And I assked to be called Ssalazar, in honor of my misstress' father who gave hiss life to ssave herss."*

Harry nodded, impressed that a Basilisk could be so thoughtful. "About that, I promised you I would bring the book back if I found it." He spoke in human language this time and gave her Slytherin's diary.

Her eyes lit up once she saw the small book and she took it with great care and joy. "Father Salazar's diary! You found it!"

If it hadn't been from the Basilisk's quick catch the diary would have fallen on the floor as Serena flung herself onto the unsuspecting green eyed boy. "Thank you so much Harry! You don't know how much this means to me!"

Harry stumbled from his chair with a 'huff!' and he fell on the floor with the girl's grip still tight around his waist. Harry felt his cheeks flame up at the closeness and hesitantly began to return the hug. "You're quite welcome. I actually spent the entire second week reading it and trying to solve some puzzles. Everything you said fits in the story and the diary speaks for itself." Harry didn't dare speak further and gave the girl all the time she needed to get this joy out of her system.

Once she realized the position they were in, her face turned red and she sat up quickly, laughing nervously at the embarrassing situation. Harry also joined her and they looked at each other silently for a couple of minutes until Serena found this to be a little uncomfortable and got up with a fleeting smile in Harry's way. "Hum, yes. Thanks again for the diary."

The green eyed boy nodded silently while he cooled off.

The silver haired girl started to skim the small leather book and it made Harry remember something. "Hey Serena? There's a small note on the back of the cover and I wasn't able to find out what it meant. Can you check it out?"

The girl blinked and read said note, frowning when it proved to be a cryptic message. "So? Do you know what it means?" Harry asked eagerly. "You know, 'Find the keys and save your legacy'."

The girl seemed to think about it and Harry was all ears when she finally opened her mouth to reply. "I have no idea what it is talking about."

Harry face-faulted. "WHAT?! B-but!"

He started to protest but she shrugged it off. "I'll read the diary completely, maybe it'll help. Did you start your relaxation like I asked you to?"

The change of subject was abrupt but Harry was so excited he didn't pay any heed. "Yeah. It's helping but it's difficult when I have Umbridge, Snape, Malfoy and now even Dumbledore, sometimes, to deal with."

Serena gave him an encouraging smile. "Don't worry. We'll start Occlumency and I'll show you how to block their voices when you don't want to hear them."

"Cool!" The boy exclaimed while grinning happily.

Serena looked at him weirdly. "Cool? Are you cold?"

Harry chuckled and told her it was an expression, that it meant for something to be amazing. "I'll have to teach you our expressions; they changed a lot since your time. And probably the spells too."

Serena didn't look so sure about the spells but to learn his way of talking did sound interesting. "We'll see about it. Next time you come just bring me a book on Hogwarts and a book of spells I can try. For now, just sit back and relax. I want you to try to push me out of your mind."

Harry sat and gulped. He tried to relax but his heart was beating too fast.

He wasn't ready when she said calmly "Legilimens!"

Harry bunched his fists and closed his eyes tightly, expecting to receive the spell at full power. However, he blinked in surprise when all he felt was a slight pull at his memories.

"What are you doing, Harry? Were you not ready?" She stopped her spell and Harry shook up his confusion.

"Sorry. The intensity of the spell just surprised me. I was afraid you'd attack my mind with a lot more force than that."

It was Serena's turn to look confused. "No, I can perfectly control the power I use behind my spells. But what made you fear that I would do this to you?"

Harry's eyes took on a darker shade of green and he muttered sulkily: "Last year, Dumbledore assigned Snape to teach me how to block my mind. He just told me to relax and push him out and then ruthlessly started to attack my mind again and again. He invaded my privacy a

lot last year and he even did it this year. I...we stopped this for personal reasons and now he's using this power at his advantage when he knows that I'm unable to defend myself against this."

Harry glanced up at the silver haired girl and was shocked to find concern and a deep anger written in her eyes. He almost reeled back at the fury he could see in her one blue and one green eyes. He shook his head; he could've sworn he saw a faint silver magical aura swimming calmly around her body. "Huh, Serena? You okay?"

The girl blinked and the 'illusion' vanished, but not her angry expression, though lessened when she looked at him. "I'm sorry about that. I didn't mean to scare you. But what you told me is grave! No beginner should experience Occlumency at its full power. It can cause serious trauma! I'm relieved that these special classes ended quickly. Now just forget about this unorthodox way of doing it and just concentrate on the beat I'll make you learn this. There's no point going at full force if you don't even know how to push the invading presence away! It's like asking a first year student to do the Expelliarte spell on his first day of school when he doesn't even know how to wave a wand!" she said with conviction.

"Expelliarte? Sounds like Expelliarmus..."

Serena waved it off. "It's probably a derivative of the spell, then."

Harry was about to ask her something when a pissed voice stopped him from uttering another word.

"If you two are quite finisshed? Thiss incccessant human babbling is boring and quite vexing."

Both sixteen years old turned towards the Basilisk which slithered up his mistress' legs and up to her shoulder.

"Ssalazar I apologize if we have excluded you from the conversssation. Harry, let'sss begin again!"

Harry wasn't bothered by the fact that she spoke so casually to him in Parseltongue. He heard the young Basilisk named Salazar thank her and the green eyed boy shrugged and relaxed.

“Legilimenssss!”

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Chapter13: Relapse

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It was approaching five in the morning when Harry went back to his dorm under his invisibility cloak. He was tired beyond reason and felt as if his brain was turning into mush, but he was satisfied of his work.

He didn't think Occlumency could be so interesting and he was even the one who begged Serena to continue even if his concentration had diminished over the hours; Voldemort would never give him a chance to rest anyway.

Of course, Serena hadn't used the mind probing at its maximum capacity but at least now he knew the basics of this dark art and how it worked, and how to recognize the first symptom of when someone was trying to get into his mind.

"I would probably not be able to push Snape, Dumbledore or Voldemort away right now but at least it's a start, and I will only get better under her tutelage," Harry whispered to himself, only now faintly remembering that she hadn't used any wand. However he quickly forgot about it as his fatigue won over his thinking process.

At least, Serena had given him a true chance, whereas Snape had totally cast him off. Okay, Harry knew he had done something wrong by looking into Snape's Pensieve last year but damn it! He had apologized and Snape hadn't been the only one to have had a bad life as a youngster! And now his teacher was treating him the same way James had treated the potions master.

"Damn it! I miss Sirius." Harry started to stress again but as his head hit his pillow, he fell into a much needed sleep, only too aware that he had to get up in only a few hours. Oh well, there was a price to pay to learn how to stay alive...he would just be groggy and even less approachable today.

Neville understood this quite clearly when he tried to awaken Harry at seven: he nearly got hexed and decided it was better to let Harry sleep; he did look pretty tired. He joined Ron and Seamus in the common room and Seamus asked where Harry was.

"I wouldn't try to go back in our bedroom, you guys. I think Harry's got a nightmare again and it made him pretty irritable," Neville stated.

Ron looked worried about his dark haired friend but paid heed to Neville's warning and the trio, quickly followed by Hermione, trekked towards the Great Hall to eat their breakfast and then to their first class; in Neville, Ron and Seamus' case it was Care of Magical Creatures. Hermione was probably heading to Arithmancy or Ancient Runes or something along those lines.

Hagrid saw the students arrive from his place in his hut, but he sighed sadly as he was not permitted to be the teacher this year, order of Umbridge and probably a request from young Malfoy. Draco was as influential as his father, even if Malfoy Senior was in Azkaban (but for how long?).

No, the teacher this year was a plump, severe and impatient looking woman from a branch of the ministry. Hagrid scoffed loudly; severity and impatience were two qualities that did not bode well with magical creatures.

Professor Manta rallied her students and urged them to stop talking before she took away house points. The class was mixed: there were Gryffindors, Hufflepuffs, Ravenclaws and a few Slytherins, Draco Malfoy implied, just present to piss the Gryffindors off.

Class soon started and Malfoy looked around with a frown. His favorite play thing was missing: one Harry Potter. 'Damnation! Now class is going to be boring!' the blonde thought angrily.

It was only thirty minutes later that Harry finally showed up, running towards them and trying to put his cloak on at the same time. Professor Manta pursed her lips and gave him the evil eye. "Mr. Potter, how nice of you to finally join us. Fifteen points off Gryffindor and I hope my class hasn't interrupted your beauty sleep?"

The Slytherins snickered and Malfoy was mentally rejoicing. 'I don't even have to bug him for the teacher to take points off! He's doing it by himself!'

Harry barely heard the woman as he sat down, finally succeeding in putting his cloak on: it was getting a little chilly outside by this time of year. He acknowledged the teacher with a small hum and the plump woman huffed, going back to her lesson.

Harry looked at Ron accusingly. "Why didn't you wake me up this morning??" he whispered fiercely to the red headed boy.

Ron shrugged at him, his eyes wide. "Don't look at me!" the red-head whispered back. "It's Neville who tried, the key-word is tried, to wake you up this morning but he told me you nearly hexed him!"

The boys shut up when the teacher's glance skimmed over them. Harry sat properly and kept quiet, looking in front of him without blinking, as if in a trance. 'I nearly hexed Neville? I don't even remember it!' Harry mused. 'I must've been too tired and got my wand unconsciously.' He should've felt sorry for Neville but he wasn't; he found the whole situation too funny.

When the class finished, Malfoy didn't wait a second to head in the direction of the Boy-Who-Lived, flanked by Crabbe and Goyle. The Gryffindors stood protectively beside Harry but the green eyed boy ignored their presence.

"Hey Potter! The teacher's right! You certainly don't need any beauty sleep!"

The other Slytherins started to laugh at Malfoy's insult and the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws stood aside, silently watching the debate and probably future quarrel.

Ron looked livid but Harry stopped him with a haunting look directed at Malfoy Junior. "How nice of you to say that, Malfoy! Your praise touched me, really. I knew I was hot but please, you eulogize me even more? I don't know if I should feel flattered or disgusted, coming from you..." Harry said loudly to himself, yet it was clear that Draco had gotten the message.

Malfoy had wrongly formulated his insult and now it was being used against him. The blonde paled, and then reddened in anger, clearly intent on having the last word in this. However, as he opened his

mouth, all he heard was the sound of laughter as the Gryffindors and the two other houses joined in the snickering fest.

Harry was already halfway to Hogwarts.

Draco was fuming and he sent a glare in the Hufflepuffs and Ravenclaws' direction; that quickly got them to move on and look elsewhere, however, Harry's friends continued to snicker.

Draco growled at Crabbe and Goyle who were trying to stifle a chuckle. "Shut it you stupid morons! Do you even know why you're laughing?!" He stomped his way back to the castle with a red face; he had to get his revenge later, somehow.

The Gryffindors finally burst out in laughter, watching him retreating with his dumb bodyguards who were trying to keep up with the quick strides. They were really mentally congratulating Harry for his quick comeback, not realizing at all that having quick wits was a Slytherin trait.

"Man, did you see how mad Malfoy was? That was great! I wish Harry could be tired and

grouchy more often if it means that he can bring the ferret down in only one swipe!" laughed Neville. The others nodded their assent, laughing way too much to be able to reply.

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Two days later, Harry was still trying to find the time to go to the library to retrieve the books Serenity had asked for and to go back to the Chamber of Secrets. It seemed as if every time he glanced behind him someone he knew was following him: it was either Ron or Hermione most of the time, but sometimes it was an auror or even a teacher or Umbridge. He was sure he even saw Malfoy once, but probably for other reasons, the stupid git.

His patience was once again ebbing away, just like the beginning of his school year. He just wanted to be left alone! He felt as if people were pointing at him everywhere he went and not even his relaxation technique was helping him nowadays.

He wanted, no, needed to see her again; only she had the power to cool his temper and make him forget who he was and what his mission in this world was.

He was now walking in the direction of the library but he couldn't tell anyone why he needed those books, and now a migraine was starting to develop. It didn't help that Ron and Seamus were having a heated debate behind him over something Harry didn't even remember and Hermione kept asking them to stop this childishness. Those three were in their own world and speaking quite loudly and at the same time.

'Shut uuuup!' Harry mentally pleaded while bringing a hand up to massage his throbbing temples. But really, the cherry on the sundae was attributed to Colin Creevy when the boy ran towards them and, still in the spirit of his infantile behavior, started to snap pictures of them and particularly of Harry.

"Hey Harry! Harry!" the fifth year boy, still looking like a child, started, "I heard that Quidditch will start again this year and that your ban has been lifted by Dumbledore! Will you play? Hm? Will you?"

Hermione, Ron and Seamus started to bicker with Colin to stop taking so many pictures and one last flash in Harry's eyes made him lose what little self-control he had left this afternoon.

"SHUT UP! ALL OF YOU!"

The four froze when Harry's voice echoed almost viciously in the empty hallway.

"Colin, I suggest you put away that camera before I rip it out of your hands and throw it to the Giant Squid. If you don't I may throw you in the lake with it!"

The younger Gryffindor's mouth opened momentarily and closed with a snap, before he hid his camera in his robes in a rapid but fumbling move; it wasn't everyday that his hero sounded so serious and incensed, particularly towards him and other members of Gryffindor.

Ron and Seamus stood on the side, eyeing each other, and then Harry warily, albeit taken aback at the green eyed boy's sudden burst of anger. Hermione, on her side, was stunned to hear such language coming from the dark haired boy, the same one whom Colin worshipped so much as if Harry was a god.

"Harry Potter!" she exclaimed with wide angry eyes when her Prefect mode went on high alert, "How can you talk to Colin, and us for that matter, that way?! You know how much he likes you and we were only holding you company!"

Harry interrupted her with a glare and something flashed in his darkening eyes. "Under whose orders?"

Hermione was flabbergasted. "What? What are you talking about?"

The dark haired wizard tensed and glowered even more, his migraine starting to cloud his senses. "Who asked you to follow me so diligently? Was it Dumbledore? Or perhaps a teacher or even an auror? You didn't think I wouldn't know that I was to never be left alone? Come on! Always a Gryffindor, or a teacher, always somebody either walking beside me or far away behind me!"

Hermione stuttered and Ron took over, raking his nerves to talk as calmly as he could as if he was trying to coax Harry into controlling his anger. "Come on, mate! You don't really mean that, do you? You're just being paranoid. We're your friends, so it's normal for us to want to hang out with you!"

Harry didn't need Occlumency to know that Ron was nervous when he addressed him and he shot a glare at the red head that made him reel back slightly. "Do you even care that maybe BEING ALONE is what I WANT?"

Ron started to sputter. "B-but Harry! We're your friends!"

Seamus even looked angry at Harry for saying this and since he couldn't keep his comments to himself and stepped up to him in angry strides, leaving the safety of Ron's side. "How can you say that?! You can be so stuck up sometimes! Don't you even care about what others think?!"

"FUCK OFF!" Harry bellowed at Seamus and the Irish boy recoiled under such a verbal assault and had the decency to look quite shaken up. Colin, despite his age, was hiding behind Ron. As if it was going to help him! Harry had defeated the Dark Lord one too many times and it's not the redhead who would provide him protection if Harry went wild on them.

But the Boy-Who-Lived did not. He simply shoved his hands in his pockets and stomped his way past them with a dark, brooding stare, intent on going to the library at last and have the peace he so desperately craved.

It all went crumbling again when Malfoy showed up suddenly around a corner with a smirk of satisfaction etched on his face. "Well, well, well! Could it be the end of your disgustingly sweet little Gryffindorish friendship?"

Harry didn't say a thing, which Draco found quite unsettling. Harry's eyes were hidden beneath his wild dark bangs, until his head snapped up and green eyes flashed red so fast Malfoy thought he had imagined it.

But the blonde cried out, as well as the four other still present members of Gryffindor, when the windows behind Malfoy rippled and shattered loudly, sending hundreds of pieces of glass in various directions.

The blonde Slytherin was untouched, but that didn't stop his knees from trembling and then collapsing under his weight. Draco's blood drained from his face when he glanced at the shards of glass littered on the floor and stopped breathing when Harry's now impassive and emotionless gaze fell upon him.

They were all sure that Malfoy was done for but Harry merely continued to walk away as if nothing had ever happened.

The Slytherin boy got up very shakily, gazed towards the equally shaken members of Gryffindor and, without even thinking about a retort, he ran away as fast as his unstable legs could carry him.

Colin looked as if he was going to cry while Ron and Seamus had completely blanched, their stomach twisting when their gaze fell on what was now left of the windows.

Hermione was in about the same state of mind as them, completely shocked and almost horror-struck.

Nobody even dared to get near the broken windows and as if things weren't bad enough, Mrs. Norris sauntered in the corridor they were in. And where Mrs. Norris was, you could be sure that Argus Filch wasn't far behind.

Normally the four students would've run away as if they had an enraged three headed dog on their heels but they barely noticed the cat, being too busy to stare at the mess in the corridor.

"WHAT HAPPENED HERE?! MY CLEAN CORRIDOR!!!" came the shouted lament of Argus Filch when he finally arrived to see where his precious cat had gone.

It made the four Gryffindors jump in fright and get out of their reverie, leaving them clutching their poor, wildly beating heart.

"YOU LITTLE SCALAWAGS! YOU EVEN HAVE THE GUTS TO STAND THERE AND BOAST ABOUT IT! YOU ALL COMIN' WITH ME IMMEDIATELY TO SEE THE HEADMASTER! I WON'T STAND FOR THIS!" Filch clutched his cat to his chest and started to pet it to calm himself; he was really red in the face and his breath kept coming out in little puffs.

Ron, Seamus and Colin didn't say anything, didn't even blanch or got worried about Dumbledore; they were already much troubled and worried as it is. Nobody even said a word and they all followed Filch diligently.

"To see the headmaster, yes..." Hermione whispered very faintly under her breath, her hands still shaking from the earlier occurrence. "He's the best person to talk to right now...He needs to know..."

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Harry ignored everyone around him; his goal was to go to the damn library and get the books, and he wasn't going to let anybody stop him. He was aware of his burst of magic because he had almost wanted it to happen. That was not a good sign, he was no idiot.

He walked more slowly when he got into the library, knowing that he rushing in there would get the attention of Madam Pince right away. The woman narrowed her eyes at him as he passed beside her but she stayed silent.

Harry retrieved 'Hogwarts- A History' but had a little more bit difficulty choosing the second book Serena had asked for. He decided to take 'Common and Uncommon Spells for the Advanced Wizard' and headed to Madam Pince.

The woman once again narrowed her eyes at him and, although it irked Harry, he found her less infuriating than Malfoy so refrained from snapping at her and causing one more scene. He knew he was in trouble again and quite frankly, he was getting tired of it.

"Those are some common books you've decided to borrow, Mister Potter. 'Hogwarts- A History?'" She raised an inquiry eyebrow at him.

It didn't take long for the green eyed boy to find a riposte to her silent question. "It's Hermione. She's been nagging at me to read it lately since I'm asking way too much stuff about what's written in the book. Believe me, I'm not taking it because I want to," he answered crisply, wanting to get this over with as soon as possible. If he was right, Dumbledore would get on his tail, or worse, Umbridge, very soon.

The librarian hummed slowly and gave him the books back. Harry almost snatched them from her hands and bowed tersely before retreating.

Harry had to take cover a few times to avoid being seen on his way to Myrtle's bathrooms. He didn't want any students to be asked if they had seen him and in which direction he had gone.

If Dumbledore came to know that he was going to the Chamber of Secrets, well... Let's just say Harry had a cinch that people would

think about him what they thought of Salazar went he went to Knockturn Alley.

When he got there he had to hide behind the door quickly. There were voices coming out of Myrtle's lavatories! Girl voices! 'What the hell?! Who are the idiots who would come to THAT bathroom, of all the ones in Hogwarts?!' Harry screamed in his head.

He was beginning to loose patience. His feet kept ticking up and down as he listened to the meaningless gossip of the girls in the bathrooms until Myrtle finally came about to scream at them to go away, that they were giving her a headache just talking about boys for over an hour.

The girls jumped in fright and hightail out of there while squealing like mad. Harry huffed in exasperation when he saw in what house they were in. Hufflepuffs, they were all the same.

He was not surprised to see Myrtle mutter under her breath when he entered the lavatories. "I told you to GO AW- Ah! Harry! Didn't know it was you!" she said delightfully. "Then you can stay as long as you like!"

Harry gave her a fleeting smile and hovered over the sink. "I'm sorry Myrtle but we'll have to talk another time. Please?"

The ghost sniffed at him but went back to her cubicle nonetheless, starting to wail madly. Nothing unusual about that, so Harry hissed the password.

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"Harry! What took you ssso long? I wass beginning to grow worried!" The silver haired girl circled him as if searching for any sign of injury and when she did not find anything she sighed in relief and hugged him.

Harry gulped and grew red, but returned the hug in earnest. *"I apologize. It'ss been Hell up there. Well, not Hell but I..."* Harry sighed tiredly and sat on her bed.

She sat beside him and when she took a good look at his face she knew something had gone wrong and she frowned slightly. *"Uh oh, I know thosse eyess. They are the eyess of ssomeone guilty of ssomething. What have you done, Harry?"*

Harry looked at the marble floor as if it was the most interesting thing in the world. *"Look, it wassn't my fault...not entirely..."* Harry began. He knew he was to blame, really, but...

"What wassn't your fault, man-child?"

Harry looked up to see the Basilisk, Salazar, slither up to them and up his mistress' legs and torso to finally stop and rest there, gazing at him.

"I blew it up...again. Everyone kept following me and I wass beginning to loossse patience so I made ssome windowss sshatter when Malfoy provoked me. He sshould've just leave me alone." Harry bent his head even more under her accusing gaze and had the decency to look ashamed of himself.

"You disssapoint me, Harry. I thought you were above that. Didn't the relaxation help you at all?" she said softly.

Harry breathed out loudly. *"I'm ssorry. I'll try to absstain myself from lasshing out at anybody who pisssess me off. But I wanted to ssee you sso much! Nobody would leave me alone!"*

Serena's eyes softened considerably and she hugged him while stroking his dark mass of hair gently. *"I misssed you too, quite frankly. We'll jusst have to work harder on your Occlumency lesssonss and concentration on blocking thossse dirty thoughtss from your mind. You are a Dark Wizard, Harry, no matter what you'll say or how much you protesst. You excel at Dark Artss and have sseen too much to be a completely Light Wizard. I am Dark too, no matter what you think. My abilitiess, the type of magic I ussse..."*

"You mean wandless magic?" Harry asked.

She looked faintly surprised at him.

Harry held back a sad chuckle. *"Yess, I've sseen you do magic, no matter how ssmall the amount, and you never ussed a wand. Occlumency wass a dead giveaway. Even Ssnape ussed hiss wand during hiss lesssonss. I know I'm a Dark Wizard. I think I've known for a long time but never wanted to admit it to myself. Truth iss, I don't thinknit'ss such a bad thing anymore. Ron would flip to hear me ssay that; he thinkss Dark Wizardss are necesssarily evil because he'ss a Light one. But I know the difference. Dark iss not evil,"* Harry concluded while Serena nodded with a proud smile at this statement.

Salazar lifted his scaly tail to stroke his arm once, and then his mistress' face as a caring move. *"That'ss right, man-child. Dark iss a sshade of grey and evil iss black. Dark iss balance."*

As the Basilisk hissed the word 'balance', the heir of Slytherin and Gryffindor seemed to freeze as this very word echoed repeatedly in her mind. Voices she had never heard, voices she found comforting, as well as terribly frightening.

'Balance'

'Balance'

'You are'

'Balance'

'It's Destiny'

'Balance'

'You are the'

'Balance'

'Only you'

'Balance'

'You are destined to be Balance, hime!'

'Balance'

'But I don't want to!'

'Balance'

'YOU ARE THE BALANCE, HIME!'

Her eyes snapped open once she found her arm stinging. "Ow," she hissed, more of a dizzy statement than an exclamation of shock. She looked down to see a trickle of blood run down her arm and gazed upwards to see the surprised face of Harry.

"Did you really have to bite her?" Harry asked Salazar. "I know we weren't able to get her attention but you didn't have to bite her!"

The Basilisk looked cross. *"My mosst ssincere apologies, misstresss, but we tried to get your attention for quite ssome time now. There wass an aura around you that sstarted to develop; an unussual, unknown aura and I preferred to make you come back from your daydream ass sssoon ass possssible."*

Salazar slithered upwards and stroked her cheek with a quick flick of his tongue. Harry concluded it was like a peck on the cheek, Basilisk-way.

"It'ss alright. I have to thank you, really. Thiss sstrange dream wass starting to make me queasy, I don't know why. And I know you would never intentionally poissson me with your bite. Don't worry, Harry. Thiss little sscratch will heal in a couple of hourss. Now, sshall we begin Occlumency again?"

Harry took a big intake of breath and nodded.

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Chapter 14: Ideal Picture

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Last time

“...Now, sshall we begin Occlumency again?”

Harry took a big intake of breath and nodded.

-NOW-

As Harry nodded, she set Salazar aside and went to one of her drawers, fumbling and searching for something. She made a little noise when she found what she was looking for and took out something that looked like a morsel of paper rolled on itself; it was old because the borders were all yellowed but it appeared to be in good condition, still.

“Ssince it’ss hard for you to concentrate, we will try another way, my way. Maybe it will help you as it helped me to sstart. I want you to sstare at it and relax, empty your mind ass much ass possssible.”

She unrolled the paper and Harry blinked. *“But that’ss a picture of the moon, iss it not? How ssstrange that you find peaccce in ssuch a picture.”*

She pouted at him and almost shoved the image in his face, holding it by the edges. Harry had no choice but to shrug and stare at it. As he finally started to listen to her, she nodded approvingly and sat more comfortably, the paper still in her hands, although a little farther from Harry’s face.

“Good, continue. My fatherss alsso thought it ssstrange of me to find thiss picture alluring but there’ss ssomething about that glowing ball that makess my heart find it’ss peace.” She didn’t get any response and looked over the paper and then lowered it slowly with a small smile on her face. *“I guesss it worked...”*

Harry was staring in front of him and sitting deathly still. She breathed in and basked in the calm atmosphere around her before gently putting a hand on the boy's cheek to make him come back to reality.

Harry blinked slowly; he was in a complete daze. Her trick sure had worked! Just staring at the white round mass had literally made him go into trance!

"That'ss very good, Harry! I'll want you to picture the moon in your head every time you're ready to do your relaxation or if ssomeone iss annoying you, it will help to sstart Occlumency fasster thiss way. Ssomeday you will be able to do thiss automatically without even trying. But for now it'ss very good. Let me try Legilimency again on you."

Harry, this time, didn't feel nervous at all and nodded slowly and confidentially.

"Legilimenssss!"

A silver mist pulled at his memories and he concentrated a decided frown on his face. 'No.'

The mist dissipated and Harry closed his eyes, breathing in deeply.

"Good. Again. I want you to pussh me away the ssecond you feel me enter your mind. Legilimenssss!"

As soon as the green eyed boy felt the beginning of a pull, he bunched his hands in a fist. 'No.'

Still, the mist pressed at his defenses, surprising Harry, but he decided to push at it instead of letting it get past his (unstable) mental barrier. 'NO!'

The silver mist wandered around but Harry wasn't playing; with one last effort he shoved at it with all he had and he breathed out in relief and pride when it vanished completely in an instant. Sweat was matting his forehead as he suddenly leaned backwards and stretched out on the marble floor, a satisfied smile etched on his face.

Serena also got out of her trance and maneuvered herself so she could lie down beside him. *"I'm ssorry if I pusshed too much. Normally I would've sstopped at the firsst try but I wanted to ssee if you were able to pussh me away with more conviction. I guesss it worked. It'ss normal for you to feel exhaustted after thiss exerciccce but you'll get ussed to thiss rhythm quite rapidly ass we continue. It would be besst to sstop for today. You sshould get some resst. Do you have the bookss I assked you to bring?"*

Harry told her she didn't need to apologize, that he found the experience to be quite challenging and entertaining. He got up and retrieved the books from his schoolbag, giving them to her as he explained, under the ever watchful eyes of Salazar; *"I got 'Hogwartss-A Hisstory,'" he gave her the heavy book and she skimmed it rapidly. "It'ss the mosst recent book about Hogwartss and it talkss a little about itss hisstory. And here'ss 'Comon and Uncommon Sspellss for the Advanced Wizard'. It'ss more of a lisst of sspellss than the actual way of doing it, but ssince you've got no wand..."* Harry trailed off, knowing that she got his drift.

She accepted the second book and put them aside for the moment. *"Thank you, Ill read them later. When will I ssee you again?"*

Harry chewed his lips. *"About that... It'ss really not eassy to come here. It'ss not a lack of will, on the contrary. If I could I would come here everyday and sstay hourss. But I have to evade sso many people in order to keep thiss a ssecret! The Marauderss Map helpss to a certain point but it'ss not infallible."*

She frowned and asked to see the map. Harry gave her without hesitating and she gave it a look-over. *"Thiss map is quite incomplete, Harry. Who desssigned it?"*

The boy gave her a sad smile. *"My father and hiss friendss when they were sstudentss here."*

She nodded with a thoughtful expression, and then started to trace different patterns on the map while muttering an incantation under her breath.

Harry didn't recognize the language she was speaking so it probably was an older version of Latin.

After a couple of minutes she gave him the map back with this explanation: *"I remodeled your map. Ass you can sssee, a lot of hidden passsagewayss were misssing so I took care of creating them on thiss map. I alsso put a sspecial sspell on it sso that only you will be able to read it. The ssecretss on this map are too important to let anybody toy with it. There'ss a way to get to Myrtle'ss lavatoriess directly from the Gryffindor Common Room."*

Harry scanned the new information and frowned when he recognized some passageways Fred and George had crossed out. He pointed this to her. *"About thiss hidden passsageway you're talking about in the Gryffindor Common Room, my two friendss who had this map before me were sure that there wass ssomething there but they've never been able to open it. That'ss why there wass a crosss on thiss entrance, ass well ass all the otherss marked out."*

Serena frowned and looked at the map carefully. It didn't take long for her to understand the problem. *"I know what iss wrong. My fatherss had blocked certain entrancess but their magic has worn out ssince that time. However, ssome entrances I have blocked and ssince my magic iss more powerful it alwayss held out. I have no choice: I will have to come out of the Chamber of Ssecretss to unblock the passagewayss you will need. Problem iss: when to do it?"* Serena chewed on her bottom lip worriedly.

This was a school and the corridors were hardly ever deserted. Harry made her jump when he got all excited and Salazar rolled around his mistress' torso to gaze at the energetic boy.

"I know! There'ss a Quidditch match in three dayss and everyone alwayss goess to the Quidditch matchess! You'll be able to get out then!"

The silver haired girl nodded with a small smile, saying that it was a perfect occasion. Harry bid her good night and went back to the more living part of Hogwarts, leaving Serena gazing at his retreating back.

"So, Quidditch sstill exisstss in thosse daysss..."

Salazar, who was still rolled up around her torso, squeezed gently to light up her face a little. *"You misss it, don't you? Playing Quidditch with your father Godric? You've misssed a lot while you were ssleeping."*

Serena petted his head and nodded sadly. She marched to one of the sealed doors in her room and muttered "Aperio". A small unlocking sound echoed shortly in the silent room and the locked door opened without a sound.

Salazar watched as she retrieved a broom and closed the closet behind her. *"What iss thiss? A broomsstick?"* The Basilisk asked curiously while his tongue flickered over the polished handle of white wood.

"Not jusst a broom, Ssalazar, but the broom father Godric made esspecially for me. One night, when I wass much younger, he caught me outsside on the Quidditch pitch, sstaring at the moon ass I did with the paper I ussed during Occlumency lesssonss with father Ssalazar. He knew I liked Quidditch but I had never had a broomsstick to call my own. It'ss cusstom-made sso it'ss one of a kind. Father Godric made it with hiss imagination, that'ss why it doessn't ressemble any broomsstickss of thiss time. I wass ecsstatic when he gave it to me; he alssso ssaid it wass called 'Plenilunium', because he had the idea of making one to me when I was gazing at the full moon."

The Basilisk hissed his awe. *"Plenilunium isss a good name. It goess with the beautiful carved white wood he ussed to make it."*

Serena smiled warmly and put the broom aside. *"I'm happy you like it sso much. However, I don't think I will have the opportunity to usse it here."*

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Minerva McGonagall was not a happy woman right now, and the Gryffindors stayed out of her way as she stood stiffly in front of the entrance portrait in the Common Room, her feet tapping the carpet in a stressed rhythm and her arms folded impatiently.

She was getting worried over Harry's prolonged absence but exteriorly she was as stiff as a stone gargoyle. Hermione, Ron, Seamus and Colin were all waiting timidly behind her, almost hiding under her heated stare as she waited for Harry to show up.

"What do you think will happen, Ron? Is Harry going to be expelled?" Colin squeaked out from behind Seamus. The last thing the photographer boy wanted was his hero to be expelled.

Ron didn't know what to say so Hermione answered for him in a whisper. "I don't think he'll get expelled, Colin, but other than that I have no idea what's going to happen to him." The poor girl sounded really worried about Harry's fate.

McGonagall sniffed disdainfully, making them jump nervously and step back from her a little. They didn't think she had heard them.

"Miss Granger is right: Mister Potter will not be expelled. But I expect a full sincere apology and he will have to clean the mess he caused in the corridor in question under the supervision of Argus and Madam Umbridge. We cannot tolerate such behavior any longer in a school where students can get easily hurt," she replied crisply to the four Gryffindors.

They stood there for what seemed like hours until an unruly mop of black hair showed up past the Fat Lady's portrait, revealing one tired looking Boy-Who-Lived.

"HARRY POTTER! COME HERE THIS INSTANT!" the Transfiguration teacher barked out angrily, though she was mentally relieved he was alright.

Harry didn't look too surprised to see her and obeyed without a word. Although Minerva wanted to take him by the ear and drag him to Albus' office, she restrained herself from doing so and opted for her best 'You-Are-SO-In-Trouble' glare. She opened her mouth to sermon him but Harry beat her to it.

"I know you are angry, like I know what I did was wrong, and I am not proud about it either. Luckily I've had some time to think about this and calm my nerves, and I am sincerely sorry for what I did and said.

It was completely mislaid and I acted out of anger and stress. So please forgive me and I will do anything to correct my mistakes," Harry said calmly with a sincere look towards his comrades.

The four behind McGonagall only nodded with wide eyes; they hadn't predicted that Harry would be so cooperative all of a sudden.

Minerva herself looked surprised but she quickly got her emotions under control again. "Good. That is all I asked. However, Filch wanted the culprit punished and unfortunately, Madam Umbridge decided that you would have to clean the result of your...excess of magic, under Argus' and her supervision."

Seamus and Ron gulped but Harry merely nodded, his expression completely guarded. "Understood, professor. Is there anything else?"

Minerva lifted an eyebrow at his cooperativeness but shook her head negatively. "No, I think this will be all." She prepared herself to walk away but before she was out she put a hand on Harry's shoulder. "After all, a detention with –her- is the worst you could have, am I right?" She gave Harry a brief look of sympathy and trekked away.

Harry watched the portrait close and sat in one of the bright red leather sofas of the Common Room. His detention was at eight and it was seven-thirty. He wouldn't have enough time to eat, pity. No worry, Dobby would bring him something later, no problem.

Hermione was the first one to approach him, step by step, until she stood nervously in front of him, her hands playing agitatedly with the hem of her shirt. "Hum, are you sure you're all right, Harry?" she asked slowly. The last thing she wanted was to make him angry again.

Harry rolled his eyes and gave her the wisp of a smile to calm her. "Come on, Hermione. I'm not going to bite you. I truly am sorry for snapping at you guys like that."

The three boys let out a sigh of relief and moved forward. "H-Harry, I'm sorry I took so many pictures without your permission. Next time I'll ask, it's a promise." Colin fidgeted nervously until Harry thanked

him. The younger Gryffindor smiled happily and walked away to his own dorm room.

“So Harry, mate, ya sure everything’s fine then?” Seamus asked with his heavy Irish accent.

The green eyed boy shrugged. “Yeah, I guess. Just one thing, though. When I want to be alone I hope everyone will understand and give me some space. I just couldn’t endure this anymore. I have enough with Umbridge breathing down my neck; I don’t need anyone else to do it.”

Seamus, Hermione and Ron nodded meekly.

“We’ll try to keep our distances when you need it. We don’t know what’s going on with you Harry, or what you’re thinking. You keep everything to yourself when we shared our secrets together before. That’s what I don’t understand.” Ron looked sad and confused.

Harry sighed. “Ron, some things are best kept secret. But that doesn’t make you less of a friend, keep that in mind. I just have a little more difficulty to know who to trust these days and I’m under a lot of stress since Umbridge’s return. Snape doesn’t particularly help either,” Harry deadpanned.

Ron just nodded; he wouldn’t press the matter until Harry was ready to talk about it. He had a cinch that Harry’s new behavior came with the loss of Sirius but he couldn’t really know, could he? Since the green eyed boy decided to keep his emotions to himself.

“Speaking of which, Harry, please don’t do anything stupid during your detention!” Hermione pleaded. “You know Umbridge will try to provoke you and Filch won’t care at all! You know how he is!”

Harry chuckled. ‘Same ol’ Hermione.’

“Don’t worry, I don’t think she’ll get me this time,” he said with a glint in his eyes as a picture of the full moon flashed in his mind. He got up and stretched; it was time to go to his detention.

Hermione gave him an uncertain look but nodded nonetheless. "If you're sure..."

Harry nodded and off he went.

The remaining three Gryffindors eyed each other anxiously but shrugged it off. "I hope he'll be alright..." Ron muttered gloomily.

"Aye, Umbridge is such a bitch!" Seamus finished with a grimace.

Surprisingly, Hermione didn't protest Seamus' choice of words.

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Harry had already mentally prepared himself when he arrived in the familiar corridor. Filch sneered and started to pet Mrs. Norris while Umbridge smirked maniacally at him. "Ahhh, Harry. I was beginning to wonder if you would come. I think you already know what to do?"

Harry kept his mouth shut wisely and took out his wand.

"Tut! Tut! Tut! No wand, Potter!" she added with an evil grin.

Harry closed his eyes and put his wand back in his pocket. He imagined the glowing white orb and felt himself completely relax. 'Thank God for Serena's trick. I'll have to thank her later.' Completely ignoring Umbridge behind him, he set off to pick up the sharp pieces of glass scattered around on the floor to put them in a big bucket.

The High Inquisitor sneered when the boy didn't take the bait and didn't protest against his punishment. 'Just wait and see! He'll cut himself soon enough!' Umbridge mentally cackled while Filch was sitting in a corner and talking to his cat.

Harry was completely serene as he picked up the shards and dumped them in the metal bucket with a 'clang!' He kept picturing the moon in his head and had completely blocked out any interference from the real world.

Somewhere along the night Filch yawned and got up, grumbled about his bed and walked away with Mrs. Norris in tow. That left Harry

alone with Umbridge but since he didn't even notice Filch's departure he was really too far gone into his Occlumency to hear any worthless menace Umbridge would come up with.

Meanwhile, the viper was starting to get really mad. The damn boy hadn't cut himself once! Not once, not even with the smallest and more delicate pieces of broken glass. "Hurry it up, Potter! I don't have all night!" she barked out, intent on making him panic, accelerate and hurt himself in the process. But it didn't happen.

The boy hummed slowly but either way he didn't show any sign of having heard her. It was really getting on her nerves.

Harry mentally toyed with the glowing ball, sometimes making it bigger or smaller, or making it shine as if it was the sun. He thought he heard Umbridge's voice once but shrugged it off; it had sounded so far away that it had probably been his imagination. But at that moment, wanting to banish even the smallest thought of the viper, he thought about Serena, his secret.

Her smiling and caring face, talking to him, instructing him, listening to him without asking anything in return...and the hugs they had shared. He suddenly felt his mental wall strengthen far beyond anything he had ever been able to do and he knew this instant that, aside from the picture of the moon which had helped him start, his own picture was Serena herself. His heart felt suddenly so warm and light; he felt as if a part of himself he didn't like was flowing away and clearing his mind and soul. He liked that feeling.

A little while later, his hands roamed the floor but didn't find any more traces of scattered shards and his mental wall slowly lifted. Harry felt as if he had awakened from a long and peaceful dream and took note that he had indeed finished his punishment. He turned towards the seething Umbridge calmly and lifted an eyebrow at her angry glare.

"I'm finished. May I be excused?" he asked neutrally, then, without waiting for her reply, he set off towards the Gryffindor lair.

Umbridge stopped him by gripping his sleeve roughly and bending to his level menacingly. "Don't think it's over, Potter! You won't always have the fool Dumbledore to watch over you! Hogwarts will not

always be protected by him!" She said mysteriously before grinning madly and stomping away.

Harry briefly wondered what she was talking about but paid no more heed tonight. He was damn tired and he wanted to sleep.

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Chapter 15: Tunnels and Quidditch

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“Welcome to this year’s first Quidditch game of the season! This match will be Slytherin versus Gryffindor, and let me tell you: everyone was waiting for it! We have headmaster Dumbledore to thank for lifting last year’s ban over the game the Gryffindors are happy to say that Harry Potter is back in business with his incredible Firebolt! Seriously, now Slytherin doesn’t stand a chance-”

“Mr. Finnegan! Don’t start with Jordan Lee’s speech and get on with it!” Minerva McGonagall snapped at Seamus, who reddened and muttered a small “sorry professor!”

Seamus, who had taken over Lee Jordan’s place to comment the game, uncovered the magically enhanced microphone and finished his introduction. “We can now see Mme. Hooch approach the field with the Quaffle! There’s the usual handshake from the team captains! Oh! The atmosphere is tense between Gryffindor and Slytherin! AND THE QUAFFLE IS RELEASED! LET THE GAME BEGIN!” Seamus shouted while the hundreds of students started to cheer and root for their favourite team.

The teachers applauded, well, almost all of them. Professor Manta didn’t look too interested in Quidditch and Umbridge was sulking in her chair and sending dark looks towards the meddling headmaster.

She hadn’t appreciated that Dumbledore had lifted her ban and most of all; she didn’t appreciate the return of Potter on the field. It was utterly degrading and humiliating for her and the only thing that kept her going was the plan she had formulated in her head and would soon be put in action.

The moment Harry flew over everyone’s head, his mind cleared and he took a big intake of breath. He had almost forgotten how it felt to fly and be free, and not even the coldness of the autumn air was going to break his spirit.

He looked over the pitch and tried to steal a glance of the Golden Snitch but with no avail, so he flew around in circles lazily, waving to Hermione, Hagrid and Ron.

His mind wandered away from the game and he thought about Serena, who was now probably thinking about coming out of the Chamber of Secrets to unlock the secret passageways he would need.

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Indeed, Serena was all ready to come out. She was slightly nervous: she hadn't come out in a great while and even in the old days, the times when she could go out were sparse and rare. *"What if there are sstill ssome sstudentss in the sschool?"* she asked herself nervously, gnawing at her nails.

Salazar hissed calmly and slithered around her until it nestled around her shoulders. *"Do not be sso nervouss; Harry ssaid that all the sschool population alwayss went to the broom gamess."*

The silver haired girl raked her nerves and nodded with determination. *"You're right. And I've misssed Hogwartss sso! I can sstill remember every detailss and hidden passsagess ass if I had never went to ssleep! I've misssed feeling Hogwartss' magic flowing around me!"*

She readjusted the Basilisk on her shoulders -he was bigger and felt heavier as days went by- and with practiced ease she levitated herself out of the long and huge tunnel that led to the main entrance of THE lavatory, as she once called it, now entitled Moaning Myrtle's lavatories.

Myrtle floated around the opening sink and shrieked when an unfamiliar girl floated up and landed gently on the tiled floor. The ghost opened her mouth to scream but she suddenly froze in the air, her mouth still opened and set to shout.

The silver haired girl looked down at her Basilisk and silently thanked it for being quick enough to stun the ghost before she could alert anyone or set off a ward. *"I will unfreeze her when we come back and*

make her forget I ever existed. Thank you Salazar for stunning her."

The Basilisk slithered on the ground and looked pleased about his deed. *"Lead the way, my dear mistress. I will follow you to make sure nobody is spying on you."*

The young woman nodded thankfully and walked directly to the last cubicle at the back of the lavatory. She patted the dusty stone wall in remembrance and smiled softly. "This passage leads near Gryffindor Tower; it will be useful for Harry. *Aperio!*"

The magic surrounding the wall vanished and dust fell on the ground when the door slowly opened after so many years of misuse. Contrary to her room, the passageway was far from being clean.

Serena walked in and looked at the tunnel with a grimace. *"What was that cleaning spell in Harry's book again? Ah yes! Scourgify!"* she tried one of the modern spells and huffed when only a small part of the tunnel got affected by it.

Salazar didn't dare advance in the filth on the humid and damp stone ground so he had no choice but to slither around the girl's legs. "This doesn't look very effective, mistress," the Basilisk muttered in a low hiss, and Serena nodded with a pout.

"I was sure modern spells would be more powerful than this. They refined the names but in doing so they have lessened the power behind them. Mine might sound crude and old-fashioned but at least they work at full potential. I will tell Harry to forget about teaching me his spells. In the mean time... Procella Ventus!"

A strong gust of wind whirled around in the tunnel and swept all the dirt and spider-webs away. Salazar hissed contentedly and moved back on the floor.

"*Inflammo!*" The old torches bordering the walls at each of her sides lit up and fire roared to life, illuminating the tunnel completely.

As she walked further in, the stone door behind her closed automatically to forbid anyone else from entering. Serena smiled

softly and put a hand on the wall as she trekked towards Gryffindor tower. "Thank you," she murmured so softly that Salazar strained to hear.

Serena was sure that the castle still remembered her; its magic was quivering around her as if it was welcoming her back. Hogwarts wasn't –alive- alive but it had been infused with so much magic in the past years that it seemed to have developed some sort of conscience, when one was powerful enough and familiar enough with it, of course.

Salazar felt his scales tingle and he hurried it up, not knowing what was going on between her and the castle.

It took a good fifteen minutes for them to see the end of the tunnel: the fire-lit torches were illuminating the second entrance that was the portrait of Wendelin the Weird, a witch known in medieval times because she had liked to be burned to the stake so much that she had allowed herself to be captured forty-seven times under different disguises.

The portrait hadn't seen daylight for so many centuries so it startled awake when Serena put her hand on it. It began to move again and Serena once again whispered "Aperio!"

She took a step back and let Salazar poke his head out to see if there was anyone there; the corridor was clear so she took a peak herself, not being able to resist seeing the castle after so many years.

It felt so strange at first; the walls seemed almost gloomy with all that had happened here, and there were so many foreign portraits bordering the walls that she didn't dare show herself in plain daylight.

Luckily, they didn't seem to notice a head peaking out of the unused passageway, being too busy talking to each other about the latest student gossip and whatnot. The silver haired girl strained to hear what they were talking about; some crazy-looking knight was talking with a fat lady in a pink dress where the picture of her father Godric was previously guarding the entrance of the Gryffindor Common Room. Where Godric's picture had gone was a mystery.

"I'm telling you, Milady! Gryffindor is in the league of the Quidditch match by forty points! I've got these news from a very reliable source!" he kept blabbing and bragging and the fat lady just nodded with a superior and proud air.

"Of course they're winning! They are Gryffindors!"

Serena slowly withdrew and closed the passage door. As she walked throughout the castle to unlock the passages Harry would need, she couldn't help but think about the green eyed boy and his luck to be able to play Quidditch.

As she was starting to make her way back to Myrtle's lavatories, she bit her lips and suddenly turned around, a tired Basilisk asking her where she was going.

"I want to ssee him! I HAVE to ssee him! I want to ssee Harry play Quidditch!" she exclaimed urgently and ran to an underground tunnel, Salazar following her and hissing his disapproval.

"Misstresss! Thiss iss not ssane! You cannot do thiss! What if the humansss ssee you?"

Serena shook her head back and forth furiously and opened a trap that was supposed to lead to the Quidditch pitch near the Enchanted Forest. However, what greeted her wasn't what she had been expecting: the Quidditch pitch had been moved from its original emplacement and what greeted her instead was the eerie silence of a dark forest. *"It'ss imposssible... Thiss cannot posssibly be the Enchanted Foresst!"* she said with apprehensive and sad eyes. *"Hass darknessss completely taken over thiss time? Thiss iss unreal!"*

She was rooted on the spot, standing at the edge of the Forbidden Forest, until Salazar pushed his mistress with his head in the new direction of the much bigger Quidditch field. *"I do not like thiss place. Hurry and go ssee the ssake-child before I loossse patience and bite you to make you come back to your ssensses!"*

Serena blinked and, with one last pitiful look towards the once magnificent forest, she ran towards the huge installations where she could hear hundreds of students cheering.

She hid beneath a tower decorated in Rowena's color and lifted a corner of the draperies to watch the ongoing game with wonder. The basics looked the same but she longed to see the Golden Snitch Harry had talked about so much. She laughed in joy when she finally spotted Harry on his broom, searching for the minuscule golden ball. *"Look Ssalazar! There'ss Harry!"*

Salazar's tail quickly shot out and encircled the hand she had unconsciously pointed out of the drapery and brought it back underneath the stands, giving his mistress a disapproving look.

Serena had the decency to blush and she fisted her hands in her green cloak so she wouldn't make any more mistakes. She felt a little sick to see so many people at once, out of a sudden, and she silently thanked the Basilisk for rectifying her gaffe.

Serena continued to watch the game, though, and she frowned when she noticed a blond haired player from the Slytherin team pointing his wand at Harry secretly while the green eyed boy was diving to get the snitch.

Looks like no teacher saw that, because the green clad players were all flying together and making it difficult to see their movements.

The nasty hex came out of nowhere and Serena acted purely out of instinct, while Salazar hissed at her and the students and teachers where all crying out and panicking.

Harry heard the warning too late and glanced backwards to see the spell aiming straight at him.

Dumbledore didn't even had the time to mutter one of his crazy incantations when an unknown string of magic came out of nowhere and intercepted the hex just in time.

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Serena saw the hex and acted immediately: "Declino!" she muttered harshly, her hand outstretched in Harry's direction. It didn't even take a second for her magic to burst out of her hand and collide with the hex, deflecting it far away from Harry.

The green eyed boy saw the hex being deflected and looked back in front of him just in time to stop his broom from hitting the ground at full speed. He had the snitch in his hand, but as the crowd was left speechless and cheering and wondering what the hell had happened, Harry continued to float mere centimetres from the ground, eyeing his entourage subtly out of the corner of his eyes as to not alert the teachers' attention.

He saw Serena's smiling face just in time as the teachers and his friends all came running in his direction. As he glanced back, the corner of the drapery was down again and there was no trace of the silver haired girl and her Basilisk, who was probably really pissed at the moment.

He would have to thank her later, he mentally noted to himself, and let his friends cheer all they wanted while Dumbledore was eyeing the grounds quite suspiciously.

Harry never let any memories surface and his innocent façade was as strong as ever.

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Serena went back to the castle by the same trap door near the dark forest and ignored Salazar's very angry hissing. She ran all the way back and the stone wall in the last cubicle of Myrtle's lavatories opened rather quickly.

The students were probably entering Hogwarts at this very moment so she had to hurry. She hissed the password "*Open!*" quickly and didn't waist any time waiting for the huge sink to move away.

"Ventus!" A small wind formed around her and she directed it towards Myrtle, who was still frozen in place. The ghost floated away to the far end of the room and Serena let Salazar slither down the tunnel before going in herself.

As the sink moved itself back together, she called out over her shoulder "*Obliviscor!*" and "*Finis Cantio!*" and then the entrance closed for the day. Myrtle unfroze, blinked, looked around,

sniffed...and then wailed loudly, going back to her cubicle to complain about her solitude, without any memories of what had just happened.

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Chapter 16: The Old Ways forgotten

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Three days had passed since the Quidditch match, and obvious victory of the Lion's team. Harry had found the time to go to the Chamber of Secrets by the long way after the celebration in Gryffindor Tower: his mates were having the party of their lives so they didn't notice the dark haired boy quietly walk out of the Fat Lady's portrait and scurry down the hall.

Serena had been anxiously waiting for him and glomped him as soon as he showed up. Salazar was still sulking in a corner but it was obvious that the Basilisk had really been worried about his mistress, so it made Harry smile at his antics.

The green eyed boy had thanked her profusely for watching his back, although surprised that she had come out in the first place, and told her that he had a clue that the hex had come from Malfoy. The silver haired girl had blushed at his sincere show of gratitude and looked away, deciding to re-update the Marauder's Map with the missing passwords to the newly opened passageways.

The rest of the evening was spent by practicing Occlumency and showing Harry a couple of spells from her time that would prove to be useful if his safety was compromised. Harry had wondered why, until she showed him the –big- difference between his spells and hers.

It had been very difficult at first since the power needed to master the older spells was superior and the wave of his wand different, and it hadn't helped that he had just come out of an intensive but conclusive session of Occlumency. Tired didn't quite described his state of mind enough, but he was coming along great.

They had parted with one last hug, and as always Harry had found sleep as soon as his head hit the pillow.

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“Potter! Twenty points from Gryffindor! Stop talking with Mister Weasley and tell me what you know about Kelpies or else it’ll be a detention!” Umbridge snapped at Harry with a malicious grin etched on her face.

The Slytherins in the class snickered at him and the Gryffindors groaned at their bad luck. Umbridge, since the Quidditch game, had been in a terribly foul mood and didn’t miss any opportunity to mock or harass the Boy-Who-Lived everywhere he went.

It didn’t make Harry budge an inch, to her great incomprehension and frustration, and she redoubled her efforts more than ever, restarting to threaten him with detentions with either Snape or herself.

Harry sat straight in his chair in Defense Against the Dark Arts class and his eyes were hazy as he answered automatically, not even bothering to open his DADA book. He knew the answer wasn’t in it; that’s why she had asked this question to him.

“The Kelpie is a black, horse-like beast that lurks in rivers or streams and it’ll kneel in invitation for anyone to ride across. If attempted, the kelpie will drag the person under the water and try to eat him,” Harry finished with a bored expression.

The viper scowled darkly, and then grinned smugly with a superior look with her arms crossed. “That wasn’t in the book we are presently studying, Mister Potter. Trying to show off again, are you? To show off that you’re better than anyone in this class? Ten points off Gryffindor.”

Harry didn’t take the bait but Ron sure did, as well as his other Gryffindor friends, unfortunately.

“What?! Harry just answered the question you asked him!” Ron exclaimed outrageously.

“Yeah! You can’t take points away if a student answers a question correctly!” Seamus added with a furious expression, while Neville nodded with fervor, not daring to talk back to Umbridge. Gryffindor courage or not, he had his limits; he wasn’t suicidal.

Umbridge looked at them with disgust. "Thirty points from Gryffindor for talking back to a teacher when it's not the time. I was talking to Mister Potter, so I suggest you sit down or it'll be a detention with professor Snape for each of you."

Ron and Seamus sat down and closed their mouth with an audible snap, but their eyes silently told her what they thought about her. Neville only fidgeted in his chair.

Umbridge calmly showed them that it didn't impress her one bit by turning her attention back to Harry, her disturbing grin returning full force. "I believe I asked you a question, Mister Potter. Do you believe you are greater than anyone in this class, better yet, me?"

"I don't know about the others, but if you passed your exams by only reading books, then I'm sure as hell I'm better than you," Harry answered as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, looking at his wand while his mind repeated 'low blow, low blow!'

Hermione gaped at Harry's unmistakable provocation, the Gryffindors snickered, winced and whispered amongst themselves and the Slytherins gasped and grinned darkly, Malfoy the most. 'Ohhh, he's going to get it now!' the blond boy thought with a gleeful expression.

Umbridge's right eye twitched and she bunched her hands in tight fists, her knuckles turning dead white. That was it, the students' eyes widened and some of them were truly tempted to back away; she was going to blow.

But just as they thought she was opening her mouth to scream at the Boy-Who-Lived, she suddenly relaxed and raised her head up high as if to say 'you're an insect and I can squash you anytime I want'.

"Oh? Is that so? I'm a full grown witch and you're just a student, last time I checked." She said to Harry with a haughty leer.

DADA class was now non-officially cancelled: it had become an all-out bitching match between Harry and Umbridge, and they ignored the students around them who were witnessing their confrontation first row, center seat.

Harry stayed calm and poised in a semi-defensive position, knowing that with Umbridge everything was possible. "Yes, it IS so. I may only be a student, but it's not with a book that I managed to fend off Voldemort so many times in a row. You, on the other hand...I never heard of you beating anyone in a wizard duel."

It started with a low-blow comment, so why not continue and see when she would crack?

The whole class winced when he mentioned the Dark Lord's name and Umbridge hissed angrily at him. "Don't you dare say his name again, boy!" she said harshly.

It was Harry's turn to give her a haughty look. "What? Voldemort? It's true, though. Books help to a degree, but the real way to do things is to practice. And seriously, you wouldn't last two minutes against him with a book in your hands to help you."

Umbridge gave him a menacing look. "Is that what you think? I'll show you what the information in a book can do against your little practical dueling skills!" She swiftly took out her wand, under everyone's nose, and pointed it at Harry without warning. "INCARCEROUS!"

Harry was one step in advance and had his wand pointed upwards not a second later. "PRAEMUNITIO!"

Harry gritted his teeth as he felt the old spell drain him faster than the usual ones. It was worth it, though, when he saw the bewildered expression on Umbridge's face, not even paying attention to the rest of his classmates who had opted to stay near the walls.

The thick ropes sent by Umbridge stopped in front of Harry suddenly and evaporated out of thin air. Not only the effect of one of Serena's shielding spells was devastatingly effective, but nobody had ever heard such a weird spell before.

Harry scowled darkly at the still stunned Umbridge. "The only thing that differs between you and Voldemort during a duel is that at least HE follows the right dueling rules and etiquette. You attacked me

without any warning AND you're a teacher to boot! That tends to make me mad." Harry ground out with a ferocious glare.

Umbridge sneered at his assumptions and scoffed mockingly. "You talk as if you knew him personally! The Dark Lord this, the Dark Lord that! And I'm a teacher AND the High Inquisitor, I have the right to do everything I want! You probably won't last until the end of the war anyway!" she mocked viciously, making the Gryffindor eye her with hate.

It made Harry sneer in disgust at her and he gripped his wand as he shook in anger. "I'll show you how similar I am to the Dark Lord, without crossing the line! Serpentinus!" He waved his wand in a way nobody had seen and mouthed, more like hissed, yet another unknown spell.

His newfound unperturbed, emotionless state almost frightened his friends and the Slytherins, while Umbridge froze when a large Python slithered on the ground and shifted its piercing gaze on her.

When Umbridge lifted her wand to try to make it disappear, the Python found the move too aggressive and provoking and started to hiss and recoil on itself, poised to attack her. *"Disssgussting human! One falssse move and I will kill you!"*

Harry heard the angry snake hiss at Umbridge and smirked. *"To kill her would be a little exaggerated, although the idea soundss tempting. But I'm not againsst the idea of you biting her or sstrangling her until sshe turnss blue. Do ass you wissh."*

The Python momentarily looked backwards and hissed its surprise to hear a human speak his language, but a scent on this boy made the snake automatically trust the dark haired child that had called upon him. *"It doess ssound tempting, masster!"*

It advanced menacingly towards Umbridge and the woman started to panic when her back touched her desk. She couldn't step back any further and by the look on her face she unexpectedly hadn't known that Harry could speak to snakes.

Harry didn't move an inch from his position beside his desk while the snake did all the work. He was perfectly calm and in control while Umbridge shrieked in fear. The snake poised itself again to attack and showed her its white, gleaming, poison-filled fangs. It drew back, and then...

"HARRY! WHAT'S GOING ON?!"

Harry's eyes snapped opened at the new voice and he slowly turned around to glance at an alarmed Lupin and an apprehensive Moody.

The sudden interference made the snake tense and turn in both men's direction, its rage taking over at being disturbed from attacking its 'prey'.

Moody growled at it and pointed his wand at the snake. "Onis Evanesca!"

The snake-vanishing charm indeed hit the Python...but the snake didn't vanish. On the contrary, it looked even more irked at the old auror. "*You humanss are sstarting to piss me off! Who wantss to be the firsst one to be bitten??? I have enough poissson for everyone!*"

Moody, who never had any trouble with this type of charm before, didn't know what to make of this new situation.

Remus looked at Harry worriedly AND warily. "Harry?"

In other words, it meant 'Harry! Get this snake the hell out of here right now!'

Harry blinked and looked at Lupin with foggy eyes.

"*Please sstop. I will bring you to a foresst where you will be able to live without the pressence of humans.*" This simple phrase directed at the magically created Python made the snake stop hissing and slither to him quietly. Harry took it with little difficulty and it made itself comfortable on the boy's shoulders.

Harry petted its head softly like he had seen Serena do with her Basilisk, making the students squirm at seeing their hero being so friendly with a snake.

“He wasn’t really going to bite her. She attacked me first without warning, without any disregard about the proper dueling rules. She may be a teacher but that doesn’t give her the right to attack a student. I may have pushed it, but I am NOT the one who started this. Ask the students if you doubt my words.”

Umbridge started to sputter angrily after she recovered from her shock. “WHAT?! Are you really going to believe a kid who-”

Mad-Eye growled and motioned for her to stop her ranting. “I don’t even want to hear it, save it for Dumbledore. Right now I want to know why my spell didn’t work against that snake. And for GOD’S SAKE, Potter, STOP petting it!”

Umbridge straightened and directed her fury on Mad-Eye. “How dare you ignore me?! I don’t care if your counter-spell failed! He’s a bloody Parselmouth! It’s an evil ability! That boy needs to be put in Azkaban!” she screeched at the auror.

Ron started to sputter and ignored Hermione’s wise comment to stay away from them. “It’s not his bloody fault that he’s a Parselmouth!!! How can you-” Ron started to yell at Umbridge but was interrupted by Remus when the man put a restraining hand on his shoulder, and then gave him a look that clearly said ‘you better not finish that phrase for your own good’.

Ron got the message and snapped his mouth shut, but still gave Umbridge his scariest angry look. Unfortunately, it didn’t work against the viper.

As Umbridge was about to tell the redhead to mind his own business, Remus, the ever calm one, intruded in the conversation to save Ron’s hide. “Now, now. Let’s not start screaming at each other. Hogwarts’ staff and the students are well aware of Harry’s unusual ability and we would have told you if we had have known that you didn’t know about it,” Remus tried to explain.

What he got, though, was a very ruthless comment from the current DADA teacher. "I suggest you keep your mouth shut, werewolf! If it was my decision you would be locked in Azkaban like the dangerous dark creature that you are! I don't even know how I can tolerate your presence in this castle in the first place!"

Remus gasped and recoiled at the heartless commentary. He knew that he had to ignore what Umbridge said but it still hurt to hear that.

"Unfortunately, Dolores, you are not the one who makes the rules."

Everyone froze when a frowning Albus Dumbledore, standing straight and imposing, appeared in the doorway. Albus looked around inquisitively. "Now, what is happening here? Alastor, Remus, you are far away from your posts. Does anyone care to tell me what happened here to disrupt the class in such a manner?"

There was a moment of heavy silence, and then everyone started to talk at the same time. From what Dumbledore actually understood, Umbridge had once again abused of her power. But the disturbing thought of Harry deliberately using his Parselmouth ability nagged him. Harry never used, or abused of, his special skill after the disaster in his second year. So why now?

Everyone was still talking, bickering and shouting at each other when Albus looked around, lifted an eyebrow and asked; "Speaking of Harry, where IS he?"

Umbridge blinked. "What do you mean 'where is he?' He's just th-" She looked around and stopped in mid-phrase when she didn't see the dark haired Gryffindor anywhere in the classroom. "What?! He's gone!"

Everyone blinked and looked around. Apparently, Harry had been gone for quite some time now, probably when the students' attention got diverted away from him when Umbridge started to yell at Mad-Eye and Remus.

"AUGH! 50 POINTS OFF GRYFFINDOOR!" The viper yelled, almost ready to tear her hair out.

Albus frowned at her but didn't try to give the points back. Pushing Umbridge to the edge was starting to make the ministry act against his position of Headmaster. She was able to pull strings in that department and Albus knew that it was better to be wise and not interfere too much when it came to her.

"Well anyway, Remus, Alastor, may I suggest that you try to find young Mister Potter? Defense class is finished for today, it seems, so you better all go to your next classes everyone." Albus said while said students groaned.

Remus and Alastor Moody nodded seriously and walked away, wondering where they should start looking.

"I swear! When they'll find that boy I'll!"

Albus shot her a look. "Please, do calm yourself. I still am the Headmaster of this school and am still capable of managing it. I will deal with Harry when it comes to that. I know the ministry sent you here to watch us, but I still am above you when it comes to these kinds of decisions." With that said, Albus Dumbledore calmly walked out of the now empty classroom, leaving a very seething viper behind.

She was still very angry at the meddling old fool but even in her sour mood, she straightened and smirked maliciously. "Oh, I know you are, you old fool. But your reign won't last for long, if everything goes as planned. Soon...is not soon enough, but soon is better than tardy." She whispered harshly to herself, a maniacal grin deforming her face. 'Soon...'

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"Sso, I will be free to go wherever I want?"

Harry nodded at the Python and set it on the ground in front of the Forbidden Forest. The big snake looked at him curiously. *"What about you, masster? Aren't you going to be in trouble because of what happened?"*

Harry smiled a sad smile at his new friend's concern. *"You sshouldn't worry about me. I am alwayss in ssome kind of trouble, sso this time*

iss not different. You jusst concentrate on sstaying alive. Maybe we'll ssee each other again ssomeday?"

The Python seemed to nod. *"I would like that very much. After all, you are the one who created me. Take care of yoursself."* With that, it slithered away into the thick darkness, leaving Harry alone with his thoughts in front of the eerie forest.

Remus found him like that, daydreaming in front of the Forbidden Forest. The werewolf didn't know what to make of this; he hardly ever recognized Harry at all since... The man sighed sadly. Since Sirius' death. But nothing could be done about that now, and Remus still thought that restraining Harry had been a good thing to do, even if Harry didn't seem to believe it.

"Harry, we should go back to Hogwarts." Remus stayed on the safe side and approached him without falling into the snake subject right away.

If Harry heard him, he never budged from his spot. In fact, he was standing so straight and still that Remus got a little worried. "Harry?" he asked slowly while putting a hand on the boy's shoulder.

He looked at Harry's face and was stunned to see that the boy was in a deep state of Occlumency. From what he'd heard, Harry and Severus had not been able to cooperate at all in the Occlumency sessions and they had stopped not so long after they began.

So how could Harry be in such a deep concentration when he had never been able to do it before, and he quoted from Snape "The boy is abysmal at blocking his mind, he will not even try and he crumbles right after the first try..." end quote at that, because the potions master's ranting went farther than this.

Remus was brought out of his musings when Harry finally started to move again and the boy looked up at him guardedly. "Yes?" was the only thing the younger wizard said.

The werewolf looked at him dead in the eyes with all the seriousness in the world and put both his hands on the boy's shoulders, coercing

him to look back, albeit grudgingly. "Harry, what you just did was Occlumency, was it not?"

Harry turned his head on the side to avoid the piercing stare of Lupin. "What if it was? So what? I felt a pull in my mind so I put up my mental wall. You know how Voldemort gets."

Remus didn't know what to do with Harry's dismissive tone. "But Harry, in the beginning of the school year I saw your eyes change color! You were practically ALLOWING HIM TO INVADE YOUR MIND!" Remus' voice got louder and louder and his hands started to dig into the boy's shoulders.

The Boy-Who-Lived wrenched away from the vice grip and Remus seemed to snap out of it, muttering an apology without looking at him.

Harry stayed calm through it all and shrugged. "True. I let him into my mind willingly when anger got the best of me."

Remus started to sputter in fear for the boy's welfare when Harry shrugged. He wasn't finished. "But then someone made me open my eyes and saved me, for lack of better words. Now I live only for that person, that single person who understands me more than anyone else here. That person didn't judge me by my scar, but likes me for who I am, and not for what I am supposed to do. The weight of the world doesn't rest on my shoulders and I feel free and serene. That person is now teaching me how to control my emotions better and how to block my mind by means of Occlumency."

Then, Harry turned around and started to walk back to Hogwarts; the day was beginning to wane and make place for a cold night.

Remus stayed silent; too many thoughts were jumping around in his head, forbidding him to think straight. He felt a little betrayed and probably jealous that someone could have gotten Harry's attention and utter confidence as easy as that when even he, the best friend of Sirius and James –God bless their souls- had difficulty attaining the boy's trust.

Harry had a secret mentor? But who? What if that person was an enemy in disguise? And how had Harry been able to resume

Occlumency without anyone knowing about it? Where did he always disappear?

Remus shook his head fervently to clear his jumbled thoughts and he made Harry stop where he was by calling out to him. Lupin ran to the boy and instead of asking him the thousands of questions that needed answers, the only thing that got out was: "You made Umbridge really mad."

Harry huffed and resumed his trek, the werewolf following with quick strides. "When is she not? She's plotting something, something very big, and I clearly intend to know what. You all wanted me to grow up, you all wanted a savior that would liberate the wizarding world from its constant threats, well, you got him. If you don't like it that's your problem. But now I have a reason to live and I intend to fight, even if it lands me in Azkaban by Umbridge or the ministry's orders."

Remus stopped dead in his tracks but the boy kept walking, and disappeared inside Hogwarts.

The werewolf just stood there, mortified over what Harry had said. The worst thing was, if Remus thought about it carefully, that the Gryffindor was right. They had pushed him, and now this was the result. "Oh God, please bring the old Harry back to us..." he pleaded. He knew it was only a fool's prayer.

But then again, he didn't know who lurked in the deepest depths of Hogwarts, didn't he?

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Chapter 17: Profound affections in trouble brewing

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"Tell me Harry, what do you think this Umbridge woman is plotting?" Serena asked Harry with a serious frown etched on her face. From what Harry told her, two days ago the nasty woman from the ministry had tried to attack him by faking a duel.

Serena didn't like where this was going and the need to help Harry more weighted on her each passing day. She didn't like the ministry people from the start, hated them with a vengeance, actually, and she reviled the fact that there was one of these people here in Hogwarts right now, doing whatever she pleased and running amuck like she actually owned the place.

"And why is your current headmaster not doing anything against her?" Sometimes she hated adults with fervor, not her fathers, of course, but adults were the ones who started wars and conflicts in the first place for stupid and insignificant reasons.

Harry, who had his back leaning against the wall, sitting on a bunch of soft golden cushions set on the floor, shrugged with a dark look. *"I don't trust Dumbledore as I blindly used to. He manipulated me too much and frankly, I don't want to have anything to do with him at the moment. I think his power over the ministry is diminishing and Umbridge is backing him into a corner. I don't know what her intentions are but I want to find out. I don't like the way she's acting and her allusions in the last DADA class got me concerned for the students' safety. I can feel it, something really wrong is going to happen soon."*

His gaze hardened, deep in thought, but Serena could clearly see that it was bothering him. Silently, she padded her way to him and sat down in front of him between his legs, leaning her back against his chest and letting out a peaceful sigh.

The move startled Harry and he didn't really know what to do with his arms but when she sighed he calmed down and slowly, as if

experimenting, wound his arms around her stomach in a loose embrace.

He felt a little awkward; Serena had never showed so much openness before and he, himself, wasn't used to be near girls, especially being cuddled like this. But this was Serena, and somehow this thought made him relax and accept this new phase of familiarity.

He slackened and embraced her tighter, even went as far as daring to lay his head on her shoulder. When he felt her shift he thought she was going to disentangle herself from him in dislike but she merely turned around more to lean her cheek on his chest.

They stayed like this for a while, silent, thinking, in each other's warm embrace. Harry felt as if hours had passed, though it was not the case, when he looked around curiously. "*Sserena?*"

The silver haired girl stirred and glanced up at him from her position, making Harry's cheeks redden and look elsewhere while he cooled off. "*I wass wondering...I haven't sseen Ssalazar at all thiss evening. Where iss he?*"

She smiled and sat correctly in front of him, making Harry beat himself mentally for opening his mouth and loosing the soothing warmth he had been cocooned in. "*You don't have to worry about Ssalazar. He wass tired thiss afternoon and went back into the mouth of the sstatue to get some resst. He needs it, ssince he iss sstill growing. And the worriess I causse him do not help either.*" She looked embarrassed and shrugged with a smile tugging on the corner of her lips.

Harry chuckled and shook his head negatively. "*I don't think it botherss him that much. You're well worth it.*"

Her one blue and one green eyes widened and her cheeks took on a pink hue.

Harry's eyes bugged out and he clapped his hands over his mouth, just only realizing his slip-up. He gulped when she bent forwards and stayed speechless when she dropped a kiss on his left cheek softly and drew back silently, gauging his reaction with the utmost sincerity.

But this wasn't the usual and nagging 'Hermione-kiss-on-the-cheek'; it felt intimate beyond anything Harry had ever felt and before he could even comprehend how his body could move without him noticing it, his arms had wrapped around her small frame and pressed her against him.

She squeaked because of the suddenness of the movement but stayed otherwise pliant in his hold, even when he laid a bold kiss on her soft lips.

It didn't went farther than this and they parted almost right afterwards, as simple as that. Then there was silence, but it wasn't the awkward kind of silence. It was calculating, giving the other the time to assimilate what they just did.

Harry's heart was beating wildly against his ribcage as he looked at her hesitantly, not really knowing what to expect. This was probably her first kiss ever since she had never met anyone except her fathers and him, and he wasn't really experienced in that department either since almost everybody who wanted to be near him did it because of his damn fame. He was brought back from his bout of insecurity when he felt her lean against him once again: it lifted a huge weight from his heart and once again he wrapped his arms around her. No words were really needed; they had all the time in the world.

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Ministry of Magic

"Is it ready?"

"Not yet. Be patient, for Merlin's sake! This isn't something easy to do! There are a lot of contracts to sign and Hogwarts is not so easily unattainable! It belongs to the ministry, yes, but it has always been a temporary arrangement! This castle belonged to-"

"Patient? Patient?! How can I be patient when Dumbledore is loosing his control on the school and the students?! The way he takes care of this school is absolutely shameful and he gives the students too much leeway! Not to mention that he has incompetent teachers! The Divination teacher, Trelawney, she's a complete loony bin! Not to

mention that... that disgusting –Centaur-! No one has an ounce of respect for me, and that means that they are rebelling against the ministry itself! I want those papers on my desk, Fudge! I can't wait any longer!"

Fudge sighed and massaged his temples. "I told you I'm working on it."

Umbridge sneered down at his sitting form. "That's not enough! I need a date!"

The minister closed his eyes and leaned his elbows on his desk. He sighed loudly again. "Alright. If the researchers continue the good work they're doing, at this pace it will be done in two days. There's just a lot of heavy magic needed and to create such a document is strenuous for them. But they are siding with us, so they are inclined to do it."

Umbridge grinned maniacally, barely concealing her excitement and bowed her head to show her appreciation to the man. "Thank you. I have dreamt of this day for so long... And now Hogwarts' inhabitants will see what it does when they oppose the ministry and... Him. HE will be pleased to know that you do your job correctly. Good day, Minister."

Fudge nodded and went back to his papers, while Umbridge exited the Ministry of Magic with a cold-blooded smirk. As soon as she stepped out of the old telephone booth she Apparated... but not to Hogwarts.

...

Somewhere

Her high-heeled shoes clicked loudly on the damp stone ground, the echo reverberating in the thick silence. The tunnel was dark and devoid of human presence, but at the end a door automatically opened on a more... satisfactory room, which smelled of clammy humidity and death.

Going there always gave her the chills because she never knew how she would be treated. But the nervousness she felt today was somewhat dampened and laced with eagerness, eagerness to tell Him about the good news. HE would be happy with her and Fudge, even thought she wanted His proud eyes on her only and not onto Fudge.

A row of cloaked and masked Death Eaters stepped back hurriedly to let her pass; it would not be good to delay whatever their Lord had planned this time.

Umbridge knelt down submissively and kissed the hem of Voldemort's deeper than black robes. The circle of Death Eaters was silent, yet some of them looked quite surprised to see Dolores Umbridge on their side. Apparently, this little tid-bit of information had been kept secret...until now.

"Ahh, Dolores. I imagine the news must be good since you showed up so audaciously without being summoned." Voldemort kept his red eyes riveted on Umbridge and the woman shuddered under such a penetrating gaze.

She got up and backed away a few steps, still bowing, but she couldn't help the smirk of satisfaction that lit her entire face. "I apologize for showing myself so soon, my Lord, but the news are good, very good indeed. It will be ready in two days, he gave me his confirmation."

The Dark Lord nodded and a pleased and slightly mad grin disfigured him even more. Nagini coiled around his throne and hissed at the Death Eaters to scare them off, a little game the snake liked to play when it was bored. Voldemort smirked and looked down at his pet while he hissed back at it, petting the scaly head to calm Nagini's ardour.

"This is very good. I am proud of you two. I will let him know of my satisfaction some other day. You may return to your duties, Dolores." He dismissed her with a wave of his hand but she remained in front of him and bowed even more lowly; she obviously had something else to say and Voldemort raised an eyebrow at her guts.

“Yes?” He waited impatiently for her to say what she had to say.

Umbridge raked her nerves. “My Lord, what about ‘The Boy’? In the beginning of the year it had been easy to make him loose control but now-”

Voldemort’s fists hit the armrests of his ‘throne’ and the sudden movement made every sound stop and everyone’s blood freeze. “Potter. POTTER!” he shouted in fury, and then calmed down as if nothing had ever happened.

“I know. I was able to control him in the beginning of the year, he literally gave me permission to invade his mind even, but now it’s as if a strong barrier on his mind is keeping me away without any chance of assault. I do not know the sudden cause of this change... Severus!”

Mentally wincing behind his mask while he was called forth, the Potions Master had no choice but to toughen up and advance in front of the Dark Lord and bow, mentally cursing Umbridge for bringing the boy up, am him on the same occasion. “Yes my Lord?” Snape kept his voice neutral and flowing, showing no trace of nervousness.

“Severusss,” Riddle hissed the name, “you said that the boy didn’t know how to block his mind against Legilimency. So did somebody else teach him? He gained the ability to block me out within the span of a short few weeks and his mind is no longer clouded and dark and reachable for me. Do you know anything Severusss? Did you omit to tell me something?”

Snape knelt on the floor and shook his head, afraid at the inquiringly vicious tone of voice Voldemort was now using. He felt the beginning of Legilimency being used against him and Snape had to take a deep breath to allow his mental wall to strengthen. “No my Lord, I did not forget to tell you anything. But, in a reunion the teachers had a couple of days ago, I do believe that Lupin mentioned ‘The Boy’ having someone else to teach him what he needed to know. However, Lupin was unable to get more information out of him. Personally, I don’t know who could have the guts and the immense patience to teach him this. That is all I know.”

Umbridge raised an eyebrow and gave him an indignant look. "What?! There was a reunion and I wasn't invited?!" she screeched in anger.

Snape remained as he was but glanced at her with an irritated expression. Umbridge didn't see the look since his mask covered his face but his tone of voice, as he addressed her, showed her that he was terribly annoyed with her. "Of course, you weren't invited. With the way you're acting in the castle, it's obvious that Dumbledore doesn't hold you in his circle of friends, you twit!"

Umbridge opened her big mouth to retort, probably with something nasty or a scream to wake the dead, but Voldemort interfered before she could even utter a sound.

"ENOUGH! You can have your petty quarrels outside! Go back to your place, Severus! Umbridge, go back to Hogwarts and await my instructions! I do not want to hear anything else from you!"

Umbridge bowed and made a hasty retreat while Severus went back into his rank.

One of the Death Eaters stepped towards his Lord and bowed shakily. "My Lord, may I ask why the woman doesn't have a Dark Mark and what are those secret plans that you have kept secret?"

Voldemort sneered and brandished his wand swiftly. "NO you may NOT! CRUCIO!!!"

Snape winced as Nott fell on the floor, screamed and convulsed in front of the demented man. With his blood red eyes, he gazed at each and every one of his Death Eaters. "What I am about to do, you will know at the same time as the rest of the Wizarding World! You will not question my will or you WILL suffer like him! Is that clear?"

Everyone swiftly nodded while Voldemort dropped the Cruciatus and let Nott shake the effects away on the cold floor.

Truth is, Snape had also wanted to know what Voldemort was scheming but at least he had been wise enough to keep silent. When the Dark Lord had something in mind, it wasn't good to try to know

what it was before the time was right. But to see Umbridge here...that changed everything. Hogwarts was probably going to be in a heap of troubles. Riddle was probably going to let Umbridge take care of Hogwarts for him until he regained full power over the Wizarding World, or something nasty along those lines...

"Severusss!"

The Potions Master snapped out of his reverie and knelted quickly, not showing that he hadn't paid attention. "Yes, my Lord?"

"Severus, I want you to try to find out what 'The Boy' is hiding from everyone. I want to know who has dared to teach him what he needed, and as the result oppose me. This cannot be tolerated. He will probably not be cooperative, but at this point I do not very much care. Force it out of him if you have to; use every bit of Legilimency power you possess. Break his mind if you have to..."

Snape stepped back and was preparing to leave when Riddle stopped him one last time. "Oh, and Severus? Do keep him alive, will you? I plan to play with him a little before I kill him with the Unforgivable."

Snape nodded and turned around, grimacing at the thought of the Dark Lord 'playing' with Potter; more like torture the not-so-young-anymore Gryffindor.

He was walking through the same door Umbridge had used to get in when he heard Riddle call Lestrage up to him. The Potions Master slowed his hurried steps considerably to hear what the Lord wanted to tell to the sneaky, and that wasn't meant as a compliment, witch.

"Bellatrix, I have a job for you."

The woman knelt in front of Voldemort's robes and kissed the hem of it repeatedly. Snape almost gagged; it was as if the bitch was actually enjoying doing that, the kiss ass!

It worked, though. Riddle looked pleased with her and he motioned for her to get up.

"A job for me, your Lordship? I am honoured of the confidence you bestow upon me!" she said with an excited voice. She hadn't had a fight in months, though the joy she felt at cursing Sirius into the strange veil was always omnipresent in her everyday life.

"I'm sure you are, Bellatrix. I want you to choose any Death Eaters you like and go to Azkaban prison. Don't worry about the Dementors; Wormtail will go with you. He has something to give them that will help them make their decision whether they will associate with me or not. I believe it will please them enough to completely turn them on my side. In the mean time, I want you to free all the worse murderers and criminals there is and gently offer them the choice of becoming my new Death Eater servants. If they want revenge on anybody, they will have it. And do bring back Lucius, I miss his witty remarks. Dumbledore will have to pay for putting one of my best men in jail!" Voldemort thundered.

Snape made his quick exit with a terrifying feeling of foreboding, mentally cursing Potter for being alive and making him go through all this trouble.

Although...Snape was certain that if Harry had been there and heard him, the boy would probably have retorted that Snape had brought this onto himself alone, and way before Harry was born. Stupid Gryffindor nerve.

Snape cursed again...and Apparated to the limits of Hogwarts' grounds and wards.

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Chapter 18: Troubles Arising

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Rain was pouring outside; the wind was howling and blowing everything in its path...a normal day of late autumn, with the gloomy atmosphere that came with it.

Harry didn't need to go outside to feel that kind of depressing ambiance at all, though, because it was probably as cold as outside in the dungeons, particularly in Snape's classroom.

The class was silent due to the potion they had to brew with their partner, except for the occasional Slytherin snickering.

Harry had become better at potions, slightly better, since Serena had showed him a couple of handy tricks and things for this particular class after she had seen his grades on the subject a couple of weeks before. Potions with her had been fun learning and had been rather easy, once he counted the fact that Snape wasn't there to breathe down his neck every two seconds.

But with his new skills, Snape still found the way to mock and humiliate him. Harry desperately wanted to brew one of Salazar's potions in front of his face to shut the man up but it wasn't in the curriculum, heck! He didn't think it was even in the potions books anymore.

He dutifully chopped the ingredients like Serena had showed him and gave them to poor, nervous Neville, whose hands were shaking with the horrible thought of making another cauldron explode. The jumpy boy had been thoroughly surprised to see Harry look so relaxed while chopping the ingredients (and actually doing it right and methodically for once).

Harry was also aware of Hermione's gaze drilling a hole in the back of his head and he could almost see her mind working inside her head at this unsettling scene.

Ron, as always, was completely oblivious and did his best not to be the target of Snape's oh-so-famous glare and disagreeable biting comebacks, helped by Seamus for this potion.

Unfortunately for him, Harry made the mistake of directing his concentration elsewhere than his potion (and mostly Neville), and when he saw Neville put the wrong ingredient in, he cried out; "No! Neville! Don't put the Scurvy-grass in there right now!!!"

The students' attention snapped towards them and Neville whimpered and backed away from the cauldron. The potion started to gurgle and the Boy-Who-Lived barely had the time to glimpse at the ingredient on Snape's shelves that would neutralize the effects, get it in a mad dash and throw it in the cauldron before the potion exploded.

Snape made his way through by shoving the students aside, ready to give Longbottom and Potter a piece of his mind, but by the time he got there the concoction was back to its original color.

Snape sneered, ordered the gaping students to go back to their own table and gazed at Harry with black narrowed eyes. He couldn't believe Potter had just saved everyone's hide: Malfoy, yes, Granger, okay, but Potter? AND a blunder of Longbottom at that! No way.

"Potter. Stay after class." The teacher turned around and stalked back to his desk, noting the incident in a journal.

Harry frowned but didn't retort. The teacher hadn't even given him some points for preventing a major catastrophe but it was better than hear some derisive comment from Snape.

Neville shot him a grateful and slightly impressed look but Harry merely told him to stop being so nervous and read the instructions more carefully.

The class ended and they bottled up their potion, and for once it was the perfect color, to Neville's utter confusion and amazement.

Harry waited for everyone to walk away from the classroom, a worried Ron and concerned Hermione included, before he trudged in the front and gave Snape his vial. "You wanted to talk to me, sir?"

Harry asked neutrally, choosing to ignore Snape's scrutinizing glances at his vial.

"Tell me, Potter, how did you know that using Lovage would bring the potion back to normal before it could explode? If I remember correctly, you were barely able to brew a potion without making it explode...almost as bad as Longbottom."

Harry didn't take the bait and kept his cool. He shrugged; "I studied."

Snape bent forward from his chair and gave him a skeptical glare, not believing the boy for one second. "Oh, is that so? You should stop lying to me, Potter. It isn't very becoming. I don't know what's going on but you –will- tell me!" Snape ground out wrathfully.

Harry stayed where he was, completely undeterred when, in his earlier years, he would've ran away shaking like a leaf. "I don't know what you're talking about professor. What makes you think I'm lying?" he deadpanned.

Harry was tired of playing this game and it showed in his face.

Snape's fist connected with the professor's wooden desk and he shouted; "Don't play dumb with me or try to fool me, BOY!!! Are you also going to tell me that this new control of yours over Occlumency is because you've studied?!"

The teacher's face was livid and Harry raised an eyebrow and frowned when he felt the beginning of a mind probe. "Nuh-uh, professor. Not this time." He completely closed any gaps that would allow Snape to enter his mind before the teacher even had the time to prod further and Harry viciously pushed the force away.

Harry smirked at the man's shocked face and shot him a dark look as he took a step in Snape's direction. "*Legilimenssss!*" Parseltongue flowed out of his mouth easily, scaring Snape out of his wits because he didn't know what the boy had just said.

He understood, though, when he felt Potter's force begin to invade his mind. It alarmed the spy; there was no other word for it: he had never showed Potter how to use Legilimency, only the beginning of

Occlumency. So how was the boy even able to use this ability at its fullest?! He had to know! The person who was training Harry could be dark and making Harry himself turn dark and against Hogwarts!

He pushed with all he had against the intrusion in a sudden burst of fury. 'NO! A MERE BOY CAN'T BEAT ME! AND CERTAINLY NOT – POTTER-!' Snape thought, rage clouding his judgment.

Harry's lips formed a smirk; his eyes were as bright as the killing curse itself as he finally spoke, looking as if forcing his way through Snape's defenses was mere child's play. "Oh, but I AM beating you, - professor-. And I'm no mere –boy-. Remember; that's what you all wanted me to become, right? A weapon for you to use and abuse! Well, this weapon has something to say right now: I will no longer be a puppet to any of you. I love Hogwarts, don't get me wrong; it's my home, my only home, and I will protect it with all I have. But God help me: if you try to meddle in my business and force my secrets out of my mind before I am ready to tell them, I will make yours spill out before you can even utter 'Occlumens!'"

With that, Harry dropped the spell and left the classroom calmly, as if nothing had ever happened and not even on the verge of breaking a sweat.

However, once the boy was gone, Snape fell on his knees, panting and holding his head, which was still swimming madly and still half in a jumbled haze.

Asking himself what the hell had just happened, he got up shakily and retreated to his personal quarters to sit down in a more comfortable couch. "How was he able to succeed this art in so little time?" Snape's jumbled thoughts gave him a headache.

Thinking of Potter, Umbridge, Dumbledore, the safety of Hogwarts, Lucius and Voldemort at the same time didn't help at all. He had even forgotten to take points off of Gryffindor because of the boy's lack of respect, for Merlin's sake!

He got up, retrieved his Pensieve and, with the help of his wand, dropped his thoughts into the bowl containing the shiny liquid to sort them all later.

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It was the afternoon now, and the Gryffindor and Slytherin students were outside now for their class of Care of Magical Creatures. It was cold, gloomy, and it was still raining slightly, but professor Manta had used a handy little shield to repel the light rain.

Snape hadn't been present during lunch, to Harry's great contentment and Dumbledore's and the aurors' wariness. Hermione soon told them she would see them later while Ron and Harry made their way to Hagrid's hut for their next class.

Unfortunately, they couldn't really see Hagrid; the half-giant kept sulking in his hut, his dislike of the professor from the ministry apparent.

"Okay, now there are many dangerous creatures out there that you must be wary of. Can anyone tell me some of their names?" professor Manta asked to the group.

Hands shut up, and this time even the Slytherins were participating. There were some cries of:

"The Boomslang!"

"There's the Graphorn!"

"Oh! Oh! The Pogrebin!"

"The Ghouls and the Red Caps!"

Ron shouted "Spiders!" and everyone started to laugh. The professor's lips thinned and Ron gave her an impish look. Seamus glanced at Pansy Parkinson and shouted "The Banshee!" and all the Gryffindors started to snicker again.

Pansy let out a high pitched scream at him and the students winced at the awful sound.

Malfoy just had to open his big trap and gazed pointedly at Potter, who had yet to speak up. "Well, there's the Grim...and the Werewolf," he drawled with a smirk.

Harry stiffened but remained silent. Ron, however, was another story. "Shut up Malfoy! Lupin might be a Werewolf but the man is nice!" he bellowed.

Manta had to interfere less they start attacking each other. "Mr. Weasley, SIT DOWN!"

Ron sat down.

"Now, if you don't want me to take points off, tell me another creature's name," the teacher said.

Ron stuttered and seemed to rake his mind to find another name and he blurted out "the Basilisk!"

The teacher's lips thinned again but she nodded her assent.

Harry, who was in his own little world, blinked at the mention of the huge snake and, without really being aware of it, he shook his head, seemingly talking to himself. "The Basilisks aren't all that dangerous..." he whispered, and everyone stared at him.

He blinked again and resisted the urge to hit his forehead with his hand. 'Stupid! You said that aloud!!!' he mentally beat himself up but it was already too late; the teacher was looking at him with very narrowed eyes.

"Oh? Is that so? I didn't know you had a preference for Basilisks, Mr. Potter."

The Slytherins started to whisper amongst themselves and the Gryffindors surveyed Harry silently, not really knowing what to make of this.

The green eyed boy shrugged and swiftly changed subject. "There's the Nundu and the Quintaped, also. And the Dragons."

The teacher clearly looked like she wanted to ask more about his ideas on the Basilisks but she let it drop for the moment. "Yes, the Dragons. 10 kinds of 'em. I will give Gryffindor ten points if you can name them correctly."

Harry's eyebrows shut up; 'Give points to Gryffindor? That's a first!' But he dutifully answered. "There's the Antipodean Opaleye, the Chinese Fireball, the Common Welsh Green, the Hebridean Black, the Hungarian Horntail, the Norwegian Ridgeback, the Peruvian Vipertooth, the Romanian Longhorn, the Swedish Short-Snout and the Ukrainian Ironbelly. Will that be all, professor?" he asked neutrally with a light bored undertone.

Manta sniffed disdainfully but gave Gryffindor House ten points as promised. She turned around and continued her lesson, and Ron all but slapped him on the shoulder. "What was that all about?!" he whispered loudly.

"About the Basilisk, I mean. -The Basilisks aren't that dangerous!-" Ron tried to imitate Harry and the dark haired boy rolled his eyes heavenwards. "Are you nuts mate?! Let me remind you that a Basilisk almost killed you in second year!!!"

Malfoy, who heard the not so silent conversation, turned backwards to look at them and drawled; "And unfortunately, it did not succeed."

Ron shot him a vicious look and became as red as his hair. He was about to get up when Harry grabbed his sleeve and yanked him back down forcefully. "Stop it, Ron. We're not eleven years old anymore and if Malfoy wants to continue this childish little game then he can do it alone."

Ron actually looked disappointed to learn that Harry had grown a conscience and Malfoy sneered. This little comment of Potter's had struck a cord. "This ain't over yet, Potter!" the blonde boy spit out venomously.

Harry looked as if he could care less and returned to his little world of Occlumency. Dreaming of Serena was thousands of times better than hear Malfoy drawl about how he was high and mighty.

Before his mind was completely clouded, though, he thought he heard Dean Thomas throw a nasty comment at Malfoy, which included the word 'ferret'.

.....

Next class was Transfiguration with McGonagall and Harry had to hurry up a little. His friends had outrun him by a couple of steps and were still laughing over Malfoy.

Harry wasn't looking where he was going so he didn't see Umbridge coming in a hurry. The woman quite literally charged into him and Harry regained his equilibrium at the last moment, thanks to his Quidditch reflexes.

"POTTER! YOU AGAIN! TWENTY POINTS OFF GRYFFINDOR! CAN'T YOU LOOK AT WHERE YOU'RE GOING?!" the viper screeched, her face a disgusting shade of mauve.

Hermione, Ron and the rest of the gang stopped to look at them. Harry frowned at her. "I may not have been looking at where I was going, but you certainly were. You could've just walked around me."

Ron visibly winced; Umbridge didn't look too happy today. "She's going to blow again!" he whispered to his year mates, who nodded back enthusiastically.

But what was their, and Harry's surprise when she suddenly closed her mouth before another screech could pass through and grinned wickedly. "You still have the cheek to answer back to me, Potter. Come with me."

Harry sneered at her but gave his friends an apologetic glance. "I'll see you guys later," he muttered, and followed the woman to her private office, to the dismay and fear of the Gryffindors in the corridor.

As soon as they walked in her office, she brandished her wand and locked the door, also putting up a silencing spell around the room.

Harry's fast defense reflexes emerged and he also brandished his wand, pointing it straight at her as she was muttering Silencio. The

boy was sure she would hex him, but she surprised him by using her own bare hands and slapping his wand away and gripping his arm roughly.

She shoved him into the wall and muttered another spell which made some vines sprout from the wall and secure Harry to it. Try as he may, Harry couldn't shake the vines loose; as soon as he started to get agitated, they restrained him further.

Umbridge stood tall and menacing above his pinned form, a malevolent smirk etched on her face. "Not so tough now are you, Potter? Don't worry, I won't kill you..."

But Harry could read between the lines: won't kill you –yet–.

He snarled at her to let him go right now or else he would directly go to Dumbledore and make her pay but all she did, instead of cower or hesitate, was laugh maniacally at him, as if Dumbledore was nothing compared to her.

"Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Ha! Do you really think that old codger can do something about me?! He's losing his power over the ministry! That old fool will soon also lose the school!" She stopped, her eyes widening a little because she had said a little too much, but shrugged it off and started to laugh again.

What could Potter do anyway? He was only a spoiled little boy and she didn't even have the Dark Mark to begin with; a ruse used to fool people.

Unfortunately for her, said little boy was full of resources, and she didn't keep in mind that if he knew Occlumency, he could also know Legilimency. Harry kept his face blank as she continued to laugh and he concentrated hard.

Entering her mind was nothing, but he had to concentrate as to not make her notice that he was trying to read her thoughts. He weaved his way through surreptitiously and what he saw made his eyes widen in panic. Then, panic gave way to pure rage and the room started to shake. A little at first, then the objects scattered around started to move on the side.

Umbridge stopped laughing when a glass on her desk fell on the floor, breaking into a multitude of small shards with a sharp sound. "What-"

But before she could continue, Harry screamed and his magic burst out of him, effectively disintegrating the vines and shattering the silence spell.

He gave her one last look of hatred and nearly shoved her aside to fling the door open and run down the corridor, away as far as possible from Umbridge, who was still frozen on the spot because of the demonstration of untamed magic.

Seamus, who had decided to wait for him even if they were going to be late to McGonagall's class and risk a detention, jumped aside when he saw Harry run madly in his direction. "What the?! HARRY!"

Seamus ran after him but it was hard to keep up with the surprising speed of the Boy-Who-Lived.

What had Umbridge done this time? Seamus asked himself, but his present thoughts scattered to make way for concentration; Harry was still running and making weird detours, making the Irish boy wonder where the hell his year mate was going.

Harry suddenly rounded a corner and when Seamus thought he had finally caught up with the green eyed boy, he discovered he was in a dead-end...and completely alone. "Harry? Damn, what the hell is happening?!"

Seamus frowned, not really believing that he had probably missed Harry turning somewhere else, but there was no other explanation for this. So he cursed and set off to Transfiguration class, wondering what kind of story he could make up to avoid getting a detention.

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Harry ran and ran, using the passageways Serena had unlocked for him. Myrtle didn't even have the time to float through her cubicle that the entry of the Chamber of Secrets was already closed again.

"SSERENA!" Harry ran into the chamber and ran towards the surprised girl.

"Harry? What'ss going on? You look like you've jusst sseen a ghost!"

The boy stopped when he was in front of her, put his hands on her shoulders and looked at her straight in the eyes, ignoring the dizzying feeling of looking into orbs of different colors. *"Look into my mind."*

The silver haired girl blinked at him but he looked so serious that she just did as he asked. He dropped his defenses at once and let her pass, and she gasped silently at the images she saw. *"Thiss iss indeed proving to be quite a problem, Harry. And what about thiss Lucius Malfoy? He lookss like a very dangerouss person, ass well ass thiss Bellatrix Lestrange. And what about thiss sstrange veil I ssaw in your memoriess? I have never sseen ssomething quite like thiss before...and yet..."*

Harry sneered. *"He'ss not more dangerouss than Voldemort but he'ss ressourceful when thingss don't go hiss way. Bellatrix iss my deceased Godfather'ss cousin; treacherouss bitch! Sshe wass the one who ssent the cursse at Ssiriuss and made him fall into that void! But what about the Hogwartss matter? What can we do about it?"*

She bit her lips and looked elsewhere, stepping back and wringing her hands together. *"What ISS there to do about it?"*

Harry opened his mouth, closed it, and then re-opened it again with a disbelieving look etched on his face. *"What do you mean by that?! We HAVE to do ssomething!!! What they are going to do iss illegal and will causse the desstruction of the sschool! They want to take control of it!!!"*

She closed her eyes in fear, then resignation, turning her back at him. *"I- I can't do anything about it."* She was shaking slightly, but Harry didn't notice as he stomped his way to her and shook her, obliging her to look at him.

"Are you telling me you don't plan to do a thing about it? Are you telling me you are willing to let the minisstry take control of the casstle, and by thiss ssame occassion, give Voldemort full power without

anyone even noticing it?! ARE YOU TELLING ME THAT YOU WON'T DEFEND YOUR HOME???! THIS CASSTLE ISS PRATICALLY YOURSSS!"

Harry was, by now, practically shouting, in Parseltongue, of course, and she wrenched herself away from him, her head downcast and tears flowing down her rosy cheeks. She was shaking her head back and forth at Harry's accusations, until the boy understood that she was damned scared and he stopped shouting, trying to regain his bearings.

"I DON'T KNOW! I DON'T KNOW WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT! I-"

She gasped as he embraced her and rubbed her back in soothing circles in a form of apology at bursting up like that. *"I'm ssorry. I forgot what kind of life you led for a moment. I'm ssorry. I'll try to find a way to make thingss better. After all, I have Gryffindor luck on my sside, eh?"* His lips quirked up in a grin while he tried to lighten the atmosphere, but it didn't seem to work too well for either of them.

She just buried her face in his warm cloak as if trying to shield herself away from the world. Harry just kept rubbing.

"I'll find a way...I jusst have to..." he whispered in the sudden quietness of the chamber.

What a wishing fool he was.

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Phew! 11 pages long! I hope you've enjoyed! Hm, Sirius has been mentioned...

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Chapter 19: Solutions don't come easily

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Yes, what a wishing fool he was, indeed.

Tomorrow. Tomorrow, Umbridge was going to announce to everyone that she held full authority over Hogwarts, under the watchful and traitor eyes of Cornelius Fudge and his faithful aurors.

Harry poked at his food but didn't eat anything. His brain was reeling with thoughts and ideas about the huge problem nobody knew they had, but no suitable answers came to mind.

What good would it do to talk to Dumbledore about it? He barely had any power over Umbridge left. And nobody would really believe that Fudge and Umbridge were Death Eaters; they didn't have the Dark Mark on their forearms. Harry scowled. 'Stupid unmarked Death Eaters!'

Ron and Hermione were looking at him worriedly. Harry wasn't behaving normally, well, as normally as he usually behaved anyway. He hadn't touched anything from his plate and that made Hermione very concerned, as well as some of the teachers in the front.

Remus, who was sitting with the other patrolling aurors still faithful to Dumbledore's cause, was also eyeing him with anxiety.

Hermione put a hand on Harry's arm and the boy, seemingly taken by surprise after awakening from his own little world, shook the hand off.

She gave him a hurt look and Harry apologized distractedly. "Sorry Hermione. You startled me," he muttered.

At least he talked, so Hermione was happy for it. "Harry? Is something wrong? You haven't touched your lunch at all."

Harry opened his mouth, and then closed it, shaking his head back and forth. "No, I'm just not very hungry, that's all." And he continued to fiddle with his food.

Hermione sighed and gave a look to Ron, who shrugged in response. If Harry didn't want to talk about it, who was he to force whatever it was out of his friend's mouth?

Harry tuned them out again. He truly did want to tell them! Oh, how he longed for one of Hermione's great advices right now! But he couldn't get them involved; he had lost too many people dear to him to let his two best friends get into this mess.

Hell, their lives had been threatened before and after the loss of Sirius, Harry realized one thing: in order to keep everyone safe and fulfill his mission as a weapon for the Dark Lord's destruction, he would have to do it alone.

No more foolishness like the time in the Department of Mysteries. The thought of it made Harry's stomach lurch and his heart started to constrict painfully into his chest. 'God, I miss him!'

Harry bunched his hands into tight fists. 'I won't cry. Sirius would want me to stay strong and focused.' But even when he tried to encourage himself it didn't work, because there wasn't any real meaning behind those empty words.

He dared a skimming look over the teachers' table. The tension was evident, of course, between Dumbledore and Umbridge. Did the old headmaster suspect a thing? Harry didn't think so; Umbridge had her means of keeping such a secret intact.

Speak of the Devil, Harry set his gaze on her and seethed when she smirked back at him snobbishly and darkly. She didn't think Harry knew everything but her slip-up, she thought, had been enough to worry the boy.

Oh, Harry was worried. He was worried because deep down, he knew that there was nothing he could do about what was going to happen, even though he tried to tell himself the contrary.

'I'm done for...' He mentally grimaced and tore his gaze away from the viper, only to have it fall on Snape. Did he know about Voldemort's plan? Did he know about Umbridge being an undercover

Death Eater? Did he know about Fudge also being one of Riddle's followers?

The worried glances Snape gave to the woman told Harry that he didn't. Or, at least, he knew about Umbridge being on Voldemort's side but not about the plan. The potions master looked nervous; he never looked nervous, so it meant that there was something he didn't know and that it had to be important.

But Harry couldn't confide in Snape either. He didn't really know where the man's loyalty lied and he wasn't about to make a blunder by spilling his knowledge to a possible Death Eater.

Harry sighed again and glanced towards Draco Malfoy, who faked a solemn look rather badly. He looked more ready to jump in joy and pride and arrogance than anything else.

Indeed, the Daily Prophet had announced this very morning that there had been a major breach of security in Azkaban. That's probably why the atmosphere was so gloomy and tense.

Lucius Malfoy was on the loose again and to make it worse, so every other criminals and Death Eaters previously residing there.

The information in Umbridge's mind had been very accurate, to Harry's misfortune.

Everyone had been ordered not to go outside after a certain hour; the streets were more dangerous now than ever. Death Eaters forces combined with the Dementors. The green eyed boy resisted the urge to bang his head on the table.

No more Quidditch for him, that was for sure. Dumbledore and the others would never let him live this down...at least until he got expelled from Hogwarts and back to the Dursleys, only to be taken prisoner by Voldemort.

This time, Harry did bang his head on the table, earning himself quite a few stares. He got up and left the Great Hall, not really happy about having to go to his classes even with everything he knew.

But then again, he couldn't do a thing about it. Time would only tell...and with a major boost of his Gryffindor luck, he hoped that a solution would come up from his mind or in any other form.

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This very same day, in the morning, Serena had already started to search through her things for something that might help solve the huge problem. During the night she had been wrapped up in guiltiness and in a sudden burst of anger, started to open the many lock doors in her room.

Clothes, books, potions ingredients, weapons...but no clues that would help prove that Hogwarts didn't belong to the ministry. Then, she remembered something and walked around in the mess she had created on the floor.

She searched frantically and sighed in relief as she spotted the journal Salazar had left for her. "Find the keys and save your legacy...What did you wanted to tell me, father?" She raked her brain and bit her lips.

The silver haired girl inspected the book on all sides but when she stroked the cover, she felt a little bump which wasn't really supposed to be there. Her eyes widened and she retrieved a small dagger from the weapon closet.

She didn't really wanted to rip the beautiful cover but since she could repair it with magic...Serena winced at the sound of leather ripping and gasped when two small keys fell on her lap. "Those are the Gringotts keys of father Salazar and daddy Godric! How clever! They probably left something for me in their vaults!"

But in her excitement, she stopped dead in her tracks. "How am I supposed to get there? Out...in the open?" Her legs started to shake and she sat down, taking big intakes of air, her head leaning in her hands.

"Relax...relax...Nobody knows who you are, here. But if I give those keys to the Goblins...No, they don't know who I am. But still..." she kept muttering to herself.

The girl's gaze fell on the shining green and red keys and she closed her eyes tightly, her hands bunching into fists. "They left those behind for me to find them and repair an injustice! They believed in me! Harry helped me so much! He's the only one who could understand me the way he did! I can't leave him like this! And he is right: Hogwarts is MINE! And now I'll prove it to the whole world!"

With this new burst of courage, she put one of her cloaks on, one pure red with green trimming, and sealed her room. "Obsero!"

The stone wall closed behind her and she turned to the statue where she knew her familiar resided now due to his sudden increase in size. *"Ssalazar! Come to me!"*

The mouth opened and out slithered one huge Basilisk, still young, yes, but on the right path on becoming even bigger than the last one. Right now, Salazar was about one meter tall and eight meters long, and his golden eyes were transforming into lethal weapons.

Serena remained unaffected by its piercing gaze and smiled reassuringly to her familiar.

"You have assked for me, misstresss? Are you going ssomewhere?" the Basilisk asked in a suspicious hiss.

Serena gave him an apologetic look. *"Yess, and you'll have to sstay here. I'm going to Gringottss in Diagon Alley...Thiss is not debatable. Protect Hogwartss while I'm gone,"* she added when she saw that the snake obviously wanted to argue.

"Ssalazar, you know I am well able to defend myssself." She hugged the sulking Basilisk as much as her arms permitted and promised she would be back by tonight.

Salazar glared at the exit hole where she disappeared and coiled in a circle, his huge head resting on top. *"You better come back, misstresss... and unsscathed too, because the one who will dare to touch you will not live to tell the tale. Merlin help the wizarding world if ssomething happenss to her while sshe iss in my care."*

Luckily, there weren't any Parselmouths around because they would have shuddered at the vicious and death promising hissing coming from the solemn creature.

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Serena pushed the trap and found herself, once again, at the edge of the Forbidden Forest. The sky was grey and there wasn't anyone in sight, so she fastened her cloak and put her hood up before she concentrated on her destination and teleported to Diagon Alley, bypassing altogether the tampered anti-apparition wards of Hogwarts.

She never went to Diagon alley before, which was nerve wracking, but her father Salazar had told her about it so many times that she knew every alleyways there was, having a talent to memorize any pictures (like Hogwarts' original blueprints) and picture what a place looked like just by hearing someone talk about it in detail.

She reappeared in a dark little corner, relieved to see that no new store had been put there. That would have been a problem.

With a sudden burst of courage she stepped away from the dark spot and blended in with the crowd. Nobody noticed her, if not only for her bizarre choice of cloak color, but being too busy they never stopped to gossip and went their way.

There were so many shops –Quality Quidditch Supplies, Flourish and Blott's, Madam Malkin's Robes for all Occasions, Eeylops Owl Emporium, Florean Fortescue's Ice Cream Parlor- she was tempted to check them out, but her shaking legs were greatly protesting. She was too gripped by fear of being in the presence of so many people that she focused solely on her goal: Gringotts.

She quickly read the warning post at the entry but didn't dwell on it; people were coming her way, probably to make a withdrawal or a deposit. She hurried it up and tried to calm herself as she went to one of the counters where a mean looking Goblin perched on a high chair was writing something down.

"Um, excuse me?" she queried, but the creature ignored her. She frowned and held herself with more confidence. 'The nerve of that

thing!' she fumed, and seemed to forget for a moment that there were many wizards around.

She slammed her hand on the paper the Goblin was writing on, making it jump and then glare disgustedly at her.

The people around stopped what they were doing to take a look at who had caused the commotion but went back to their work as they concluded it was only an impatient kid.

Serena was pissed and her eyes, so wonderfully hidden beneath the bi-colored cloak, narrowed into what could only be described as irritation. Salazar's traits were beginning to surface, it seemed.

"You know, you can tell me if you're obviously too loaded in work to serve a client. I'll just ask someone else to help me and make a complaint about your lack of professional behavior."

The Goblin's eyes widened slightly at the nerve of that girl, but it didn't reply and got down his chair. "What can I do for you?" His voice held disdain but it didn't scare the girl one bit.

"I want to visit two vaults."

The Goblin's eyes narrowed; why had she asked for this so quietly, all of a sudden? Visiting vaults was an everyday normal occurrence...until she showed him the keys.

His eyes widened and he opened his mouth, but she slapped a hand on it surreptitiously before he could utter one word.

"Those keys are a secret I'd like to keep. I asked -you- to show me the way to those ancient vaults, so there is no way in Hell I'll let you scream this to your superiors, got it???"

The small creature nodded rapidly and rushed to the back of the bank where the transportation wagons were waiting to be used. "This way please!" it said hurriedly, not wanting to get on the bad side of this mysterious person.

He didn't even try to ask himself how the Hell both keys could be in only one person's grasp. Just the sight of those long forgotten artifacts made his skin crawl.

Serena smiled slyly and got on the cart. They whirled around for a long time but as the girl began to feel sick from the ride, the Goblin hit a lever that was really well hidden and the cart made a sudden detour and passed right through a thick stone wall.

Serena raised her eyebrows in awe; Gringotts really was equipped in the matters of stealth and security!

They stopped on the other side. The room was small and bare, and four ordinary looking doors were just standing there, waiting for something to happen, waiting to be disturbed once again.

But Serena wasn't fooled by the outward appearance of the ordinary, and almost dull, doors. On each of those doors, straight in the middle, rested the family crests of the Founders; one for each person, so it included the Snake for Slytherin and the Lion for Gryffindor.

She let the Goblin marvel and wonder about the unexpectedly blank room and she got off the wagon, going to Salazar's vault straight away. The emerald green key fit perfectly, and the heavily guarded door started to open without a sound, as if it had recently been oiled.

One thousand years of interest really paid off; luckily the room was spelled to expand when new amounts of money appeared. But the jewels and the gold, silver and bronze coins didn't interest her one bit.

She just walked around in the vault, searching for whatever she needed to find. It was only nearly 300 meters further on that she found something more interesting than gold, in the far end of the vault.

A desk. A desk completely made of pure Jade which belonged to her father, a piece of furniture he had really been proud of. She inspected it closely, reminiscing about some long forgotten memories and she smiled.

Serena started to open the drawers with care but they were all empty, all, except for the last one at the bottom. There were a few neatly

rolled up pieces of parchment adorning the Hogwarts crest, and an envelope with her name on it, written in her father's tidy handwriting.

She banished the Preservation Charm on it with a simple "Finis Cantio" and read eagerly.

My dear Serenity,

When you read this letter I will probably be dead, or too sick to give it to you in person. You have found the keys, good girl. You are now the owner of both Godric and mine's vaults, and I hope this will be enough for you to live the life you've never really had. You have also probably already spotted the piece of parchment within the same drawer you found this letter. This piece of parchment is very precious and has been spelled with a strong Preservation charm by both Godric and I at the same time. But this piece is incomplete; you will find the other part in Godric's vault. Together, those pieces of parchment form the legal contract of Hogwarts and you, my dear Serenity, are its owner, its master by birthright. If trouble should arise, break the spell on them; only you have the power to do it anyway.

Fight for what you believe in and be proud of who you are. You are forever in my heart,

Your father, Salazar

Serena gripped the sheet tightly and brought it to her chest. She closed her eyes and tears fell freely down her cheeks. 'He must've written this when Hogwarts was built...'

She took the first piece of the original contract and hid it inside her cloak securely, walking out of the "Green" vault and making her way to the "Red" one. Salazar's vault closed immediately as she set foot outside it, so the Goblin didn't really have the time to peek a glance at the infamous treasure of Slytherin.

The same thing happened for Godric's vault; the key fit perfectly and thousands amongst thousands of pieces of gold shone brightly for her to see. Again, she marched to the end of the immense space to find what she was looking for.

But there was no desk. Godric had gone all out on this one; a massive gold statue of a lion positioned in mid-roaring looked down angrily at her, unmoving. But where was the other piece of parchment she was looking for? There was no desk, so no drawers to look into.

Then, a light shone in her eyes and she inspected the statue under all its angles. It had to be it; there was no other place to hide the precious documents. Serena was beginning to become restless, but when she stuck her hand in the beast's mouth, she felt paper rustle under her slender fingers and a small victorious sound escaped her mouth as she retrieved what she had been searching for: the other half of the contract, and another envelope.

Her mouth went dry again; she had never even been able to say goodbye to her second father. She opened the intact envelope with shaky hands and she read.

My sweet baby,

I miss you so much, and it pains me to know that I will never be able to see you grow up and become a respected and powerful young Lady, not that you weren't all that before. The moment I saw Salazar being cornered in the lavatories, I knew it was already too late. Oh, will you ever forgive me? I never stopped them from killing him, but the last look he sent me obviously meant that it couldn't have been stopped even if I had wanted to. And I also knew that I would never be able to see you again. We weren't even able to say goodbye, and that is what pains me the most. I am writing this letter with old hands, and very few years are left for me to live. I just wanted you to know that I will always watch over you from above, no matter what happens. You made me so proud, and now it's time for you to rise and show everyone the result of the fusion between Slytherin and Gryffindor, and clear Salazar's name as it should be. Your magic is a gift, never be afraid to use it!

I love you and always will,

Your daddy, Godric

Now, she just let out a choked cry and fell on her knees, clutching the letter and sobbing all of her well-kept anguish out without restraint. She missed them! She missed both of them so much!

She slowly got up when her sobs subsided slightly and marched slowly back to the wagon and the awaiting creature. By the time she stepped in the cart, she had succeeded in becoming detached again and nodded for the Goblin to go back to the bank's first level floor.

As soon as the creature stepped out of the small wagon she touched his shoulder lightly and bent over him; the Goblin started to stutter nervously but she silenced him with a calm voice. "It's better for you to forget about this encounter for the moment. Not today will the people know about me. Obliviscor!" And with that, she walked away and out of the bank.

The Goblin blinked and shook his head to gather his thoughts. Wondering what he was doing near the wagons when he had so many paper forms to fill, he trudged back to his desk without any memory of what had just happened, thus forgetting about the mysterious person who had asked for something which hadn't been asked for one thousand years: to open the vaults of Godric Gryffindor and Salazar Slytherin.

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Chapter 20: Hesitation

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Harry immediately regretted waking up. Waking up meant facing the unfair reality of the world of the living, and he was filled with a sense of dread ten times worse than if he faced Voldemort alone.

Because now, the heir of Slytherin was acting through Umbridge and the minister himself and he had freed his Death Eaters and recruited new ones from Azkaban to tag along. And it was today that Umbridge was going to announce to the whole population of Hogwarts that she was going to be the new owner of the school.

The Boy-Who-Lived turned on his side and brought the bed sheets over his head to cover the sounds the other boys were making, without success; Ron almost jumped on his bed and nearly ripped the sheets away from him with a big grin. "Rise and shine Harry! You better hurry or you'll be late for breakfast!"

Harry growled lowly but Ron, Seamus and Neville were already out of the large bedroom when he set foot on the carpeted floor to give a piece of his mind to the redhead boy.

The green eyed boy sighed and ruffled his hair angrily. "What will I do?" he asked himself desperately. "I don't hold any power over Umbridge and Serena's still way too uncomfortable about going out of the Chamber."

Harry didn't know what to think; he was partly angry that she wasn't ready to fight for what already belonged to her, and the other perfectly understood how she felt and why she was so adamant about getting out.

You don't live sixteen years in near solitude and as a supposed danger for society and just come out in plain daylight in front of hundreds of people just to say hi.

Serenity was brought to this world in a most unusual, and not to mention very illegal, way and not everyone would understand the things she could do to make this world better.

Harry was sure that if he showed up with her and told the people her story, more than half of the population of the school would think that he would want to overthrow Voldemort and become the next Dark Lord.

Harry didn't dare think about the rest of the Wizarding World. They would surely kill the both of them in the old fashioned way: a good ol' hanging, or even worse, at the stake with all the fireworks necessary.

The Gryffindor rolled his eyes and got up, preparing for what would probably be the worst day of his life, while thinking about his over-active imagination. "If Hogwarts is doomed to be in the hands of Umbridge, and subsequently Voldemort, I'll make bloody damn sure that they won't win without a fight!"

With this new boost of determination, Harry set off towards the Great Hall for breakfast, and possibly one hell of a wrangle.

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Fortunately, everyone was eating peacefully when Harry showed up for breakfast, so it meant that Umbridge was still waiting for the false contract from the ministry. Maybe something had gone wrong and their plan had failed?

Harry buttered himself a toast and dared a glance towards the teachers' table; Snape was eyeing Umbridge most distrustfully but with a bit of apprehension, and he had a right to be worried.

The viper was making everyone edgy at the head table; she looked more impatient and bossier than ever, and really on the edge of making a blunder and telling Dumbledore that he was sacked right here and then.

Then, Snape looked at him and Harry sent him a glance that could be described as understanding, as far as understanding could go between them anyway.

The Potions Master narrowed his obsidian eyes; the boy knew something about Umbridge that he obviously didn't, and if he was as uneasy as him it meant trouble.

But what could the boy know? Obviously, he had proven his aptitude with both Occlumency and Legilimency, because of who was still a mystery, so maybe he had probed the woman's mind without her detecting it? But that was nearly impossible: Occlumency meant total invasion and assault in the other's mind, so how could the boy slip his way through without being noticed?

Anyhow, maybe he knew that she was a Death Eater without its 'branding mark', and Potter was trying to tell him that he knew with the look he sent him? But Potter seemed darker today, nervous but at the same time aggressive, like he was waiting for something really bad to happen. And by the looks he sent to Umbridge, that 'something really bad' was connected with her.

But the Dark Lord hadn't said a thing to his servants, and he was too busy nowadays with forming his new army and giving them the 'honor' of sporting his Dark Mark. Blegh.

Severus let out a frustrated sigh and nearly broke the cup of coffee he was drinking by slamming it down on the table.

The infuriating woman kept talking and blabbing and- 'When did she become such a supercilious boss all of a sudden? Where has her fear of Firenze and Dumbledore gone?' Severus asked himself.

He vaguely heard his name being called, but by which professor or auror he did not know, because he was all too busy massaging his throbbing temples. He muttered an excuse along the lines of 'potions needed to be done' and walked away by the side entrance with a flurry of dark robes.

Harry was sure of it now: Snape obviously knew that Umbridge was a Death Eater, but he didn't know what was going on. What made Harry come to that conclusion? Simple: Snape tended to get very disagreeable when he was left in the dark about certain things.

Voldemort certainly didn't tell him of his plan; probably too busy playing with his new 'toys' freshly out of Azkaban prison.

He got up himself, ignoring his friends' inquisitive expressions, and set off towards the first class of the day: History of Magic.

Harry sighed and felt himself grow lightheaded, as if caring too much for the world was suddenly taking its toll on him and making him indifferent. He felt oddly empty as he sat in his chair and stared at nothing in particular, waiting for the class to begin.

He heard more than saw the students fill in the class and professor Binns starting the usual boring lecture.

'I don't know why I'm even here right now!' Harry thought with a dull face.

'I'm half-listening to a lecture about something that happened way back in the past and is over when I could be somewhere else thinking about what I should do about Umbridge...or I could be in her office right now using the Avada Kedavra on her, which would lend me to Azkaban and the Dementor's kiss or possibly Voldemort to receive the killing curse, dying because I killed someone but the people being ignorant that Umbridge was a Death Eater and would have killed them if they had the chance-...

Harry snorted and shook his head, earning himself quite a few raised eyebrows and curious stares from his classmates, and a glare from Binns. 'Merlin, I'm not making any sense. My thoughts are so jumbled inside my head that I can't seem to be able to use Occlumency correctly. This is by far the worst day of-

Harry stopped his inner mumbling. This was only ONE of the worst days of his life. Number one was his parents' death, and after that it all piled up.

Living with the Dursleys, the Philosopher's Stone, Tom Riddle junior version (and the corrupted Basilisk), the discovery of Peter Pettigrew, the Tri-Wizard tournament and subsequently Cedric's death, Umbridge, her damn squad and Sirius' death, and now even more Umbridge with a pinch of minister, a spoonful of Death Eaters, a dash

of Dementors and the load of shit that is Voldemort: that was no recipe to make a cute and cream filled little cupcake...more like a botched one filled with Arsenic.

Hermione accosted him when he walked out of the class at the end of the lesson. "Harry? What's wrong with you? You've been in your own little world all hour long! I know that Binns is boring, and a ghost, but you practically ignored everyone around you. Ron and I don't know what to do with you anymore!"

But the pleading and imploring look was unnoticed by Harry, who just continued his way towards the next class. "You'll know what's wrong with me soon enough; I don't need to tell you squat. Please excuse me, I'd like to get to Transfiguration class in time to avoid being ogled and questioned by McGonagall," he muttered darkly.

Hermione stopped and gave his retreating back a desperate look mixed with a curious and foreboding one. Harry wasn't behaving normally, even in the way he had been acting all semester long that behavior just wasn't ordinary.

He seemed aloof and very edgy and seemed to carry now more than ever the weight of the world over his shoulders, as if he had a burdening secret he just couldn't carry alone. Yet still, he preferred to keep this secret and deal with it alone instead of telling someone, even if it would destroy him in the end.

Hermione suspected that Harry had another friend, somebody maybe she didn't know, it was a high possibility, and this person was showing or forcing Harry to learn new magic. After all, after the stunt he pulled with the snake in a previous DADA class and all those unidentified spells he used against Umbridge that were more powerful than normal level spells...

That unknown person had to be stopped! Maybe Harry was in danger of loosing his mind to the Dark side! She blinked when she remembered where she was and where she should presently be: in class, and she dashed towards the Transfiguration classroom, trying to think about a suitable excuse that wouldn't land her in detention. Too bad for the House points, though.

As the second class of the day ended, Harry found himself stomping his way out and into a very sour mood over his Head of House.

McGonagall wasn't Binns, unfortunately, and she had found insulting that he wasn't paying attention to what she said. So she set herself against him and asked him more questions than the others and made him read in the book they had this year.

Harry did as she asked with an unrecognizable expression that made the students gulp in fear and worried Minerva, though she didn't show it. Harry had certainly not been in the mood to talk, but he simply couldn't ignore his studies like that. So she pushed him anyway against his will.

When Harry walked in the Great Hall for lunch, the dread he had been feeling came back full force: Umbridge wasn't at the teachers' table and there was no sign of her anywhere in the immense room.

His heart started to beat wildly and his throat went dry; he already felt the adrenaline rush and the conflict hadn't even begun yet. He fiddled with the wand hidden in his pocket, ready to curse anyone who would stand in his way.

'This is going to be Hell', he thought solemnly, while getting onto his seat. He glanced at Dumbledore and the other teachers and aurors, and of course Remus Lupin. They wouldn't even know what hit them.

Midway through lunch, Umbridge walked swiftly in the Great Hall with a smile so big it could be qualified as being sinister. Everyone's eyes turned to her, and then at the minister and his cloaked aurors who followed dutifully behind. One of the aurors stopped momentarily to close and lock the doors of the Great Hall and re-joined the group.

Harry narrowed his green eyes considerably; they were trapped. At least, HE felt trapped. When the viper and her little "court" walked by him he bristled silently.

Dumbledore and the other teachers, however, were another matter entirely. The Headmaster got up and did his best to look imposing; there was no twinkle in his eyes as Umbridge stopped right in front of the head table with a smirk that almost reached her ears.

“Minister Fudge? Ms Umbridge? What is going on here? Why are aurors here?” Albus asked tensely.

Cornelius Fudge took a step towards him. “They are here because I wanted them to be here, Dumbledore.”

The old man’s eyes narrowed slightly. “This is my school, minister, and as long as I am Headmaster here I am in control.”

Umbridge scoffed disrespectfully and slapped a piece of paper in front of Albus. “Not anymore, old man!” she said with emphasis, and Albus’ eyes widened as he took the paper.

The students were whispering amongst themselves but most of the Slytherins looked at the scene unfazed.

A few minutes later, it was Albus who slammed the paper on the table, surprising most of the teachers and the students, and making Fudge squeak; an angry Albus Dumbledore was a dangerous Albus Dumbledore.

“THIS IS PREPOSTEROUS! THIS DOCUMENT IS FALSE! HOW DARE YOU TRY TO-”

Umbridge sniffed at him disdainfully, making him eye her with repressed fury. “This document is perfectly legal! Look at the Hogwarts seal! Don’t even think about trying to destroy it, because it’s indestructible,” she mocked him.

Albus tried nonetheless: “INCENDIO!” But the fire surrounded the parchment and the flame died without touching it.

“Albus! What’s going on???” Minerva and the other teachers and aurors on their side looked panicked and at a complete loss about what was happening; Albus had never looked so murderous!

The old man turned towards them. “This parchment says that Hogwarts now belongs to Dolores Jane Umbridge! That’s ludicrous!”

At this information, the teachers stated their absolute indignation but the students remained silent, too shocked to even think about placing a comment.

Umbridge sneered. "What's ludicrous is that they've kept you as Headmaster for so long!" She smiled like a Cheshire cat. "That's why my first order, as new Headmistress AND owner of Hogwarts, is to tell you to pack your belongings! You're fired!"

Albus' and the others' eyes widened and they started to open their mouths to retaliate but Umbridge shut them up with a vicious glare. "If one of you opens your mouth to object I will also have you sacked!"

She then turned towards the scared and shocked student population and eyed the Gryffindor table and Harry Potter, to be more precise. Harry sneered at her and fisted his wand tightly.

"Now, my second deed will be to rid this school of a dangerous little troublemaker. Harry Potter, you are EXPELLED from Hogwarts...ad infinitum!" Umbridge laughed when the students suddenly seemed to wake up from this nightmare and they all started to respond none too favorably to this demand.

Ron, Hermione and the other seventh years cried out their anger at her but she stayed unfazed and smirked in triumph at the power she now held over the populace of the castle.

Harry got up silently and walked until he was in the middle of the two tables; he was perfectly calm, and only his eyes betrayed the pure disgust and odium he felt for her and Fudge.

The students shut up and the teachers gazed at him guardedly. Fudge frowned. "Didn't you hear, Potter? You are expelled!"

Harry lifted his head and looked at them as if they were the filthiest scumbags of the Earth, Voldemort not included. "Oh, I heard. But since I am expelled, it won't really matter anymore if I disobey an order, and in consequence attack you. And anyway, I've been trained for this, haven't I? To get rid of Voldemort and his followers?" Harry grinned darkly at their quickly covered shocked expressions.

But they didn't deny it right away, which made Albus move to get his wand. He wasn't fast enough, though, and several wands were pointed towards him and the enraged teachers who felt betrayed by Cornelius Fudge; the man hadn't been an angel, but a Death Eater? Who would've thought?!

One of the cloaked aurors who currently had his wand pointed at Albus lowered his hood and everyone gasped in fright; it was Lucius Malfoy disguised as an auror! So that meant that every other "aurors" here with Fudge were Death Eaters!

"Since the plan has been changed by Potter over there," Lucius drawled while motioning towards Harry with his head, "maybe it would be good to announce that the school now officially belongs to our master, yes? I also believe that it is time to give Potter what he always deserved!"

In a burst of speed his wand was now pointed towards Harry. **"CRUCIO!"**

Everyone gasped at the suddenness of this and Harry grunted as he barely had the time to erect a shield around him with one of Serena's ancient incantations: "CLIPPEO!"

But since he barely had the time to wave his wand in the right manner, the shield wavered and the Cruciatus wound its way through it and engulfed Harry. The students screamed as Harry's eyes closed tightly in pain and as his body contracted and went rigid under the assault.

But Harry refused to scream; he refused to give this satisfaction to Umbridge, Malfoy and the Fudge.

The teachers were helpless and looked on with horror as Lucius kept the Cruciatus going with a smirk. They couldn't move, or else one of the Death Eaters could very well decide to end someone's life.

Umbridge grinned madly. "He's very stubborn, isn't he?" she addressed the older Malfoy while getting her wand.

Lucius scoffed.

“But the Dark Lord said to bring the boy alive. However, he never mentioned sane or not. CRUCIO!” When the second jet of magic was sent at him by Umbridge, Harry’s eyes snapped open and he screamed in pure pain; he felt as if his insides were being crushed and reduced to powder and his scar was burning like Hell.

His wand clattered on the floor as he was held upright against his will even if his legs couldn’t hold on his weight anymore.

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The suddenly hesitant silver haired girl walked in one of the passageways that led to the Great Hall, followed by Salazar who was now barely able to fit in the tunnel anymore without scraping the top of the ceiling; he was now between one and two meters tall and on his way to be nine meters long.

“I do not think it iss ssuch a good idea anymore, Ssalazar...”

The Basilisk’s long tongue slithered out of his immense jaw and gave her a little push to go on. *“You made me sso proud, my misstresss, by finally deciding to take the matterss into your own handss ass it sshould be. Do not back away now! Not when you are finally going to have your revenge againsst thosse imposstorss of the ministry!”* Salazar hissed with conviction.

Serena gulped and nodded, albeit still a little uncertainly. Going to Diagon Alley incognito was one thing, but showing up in a room full of students and teachers to tell them who she is was another thing. *“Hm, if you are ssure...”*

She continued to trek towards her destination and finally they arrived at the end of the tunnel. She opened the indentation in the wall and glanced outside; there wasn’t anyone in sight, and the doors of the Great Hall were closed, preventing her from seeing what was going on inside.

“Curiouss...Ssalazar, sstay here and keep your eyess closed.”

The Basilisk hissed in affirmative and stayed put in the passageway while she got out and left the opening half-closed. She walked

cautiously towards the huge doors and leaned an ear on it, frowning a little all she heard was the voice of a woman saying that the Headmaster was sacked, and gasping when she heard her say that Harry Potter was expelled.

The voice of a man called forth the Cruciatus curse and Serena heard the people inside cry out in fright; but since Harry's voice called forth the shielding spell Clipeo, the silver haired girl concluded that Harry had been successfully able to fend off the attack.

Still, people were crying out inside, making her more nervous, and when a second Cruciatus was sent, this time by a woman's voice, she startled when she heard Harry's distinctive voice scream in pure agony.

"Harry? Harry! HARRY! **HARRY!**"

Taken by a sudden burst of fear for the Gryffindor and of rage against those who dared to torture whom she loved, she started to pound her fists madly onto the locked doors. But nobody heard her on the other side with all the screaming and shouting that went on inside.

"Why aren't the teachers helping him?! What's going on?! Harry!"

She suddenly stopped pounding and took a few steps backwards, her eyes glowing with repressed fury. Her body straightened and tensed, and a silver aura briefly surrounded her, making her long hair sway around her.

She had never felt like this before! Her heart pounded so strongly she thought it would escape her ribcage, and a nostalgic feeling of long forgotten power invaded her. Every one of her senses focused on the huge doors and on the screams coming from Harry's mouth.

The spell that flew out of her mouth left the impression of a ruthless being left loose and ready to act without restraint.

"PRAEPOTENS APERIO!!!"

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.....
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“PRAEPOTENS APERIO!!!”

The doors rumbled and quivered, and the blast of magic that left her body almost removed the doors from their hinges. They opened violently and banged on the walls inside the Great Hall, stopping all movement when splinters of wood flew on the students' tables.

But the blonde man and the one Harry had described as Umbridge were still holding Harry in the Cruciatus, although with surprised expressions etched on their faces. The minister had backed away in the protection of the disguised Death Eaters, not so disguised anymore.

Hearing Harry scream almost tiredly now made her sneer and she tuned out everyone around her to focus on her friend's assailants. “FINIS CANTIO!” she ground out with a powerful voice and a wave of magic destroyed both Cruciatus curses at the same time.

Harry fell on the floor completely boneless and non-responding. She ran to him and kneeled on the ground beside the boy, and then put his head in her lap to caress his hair and softly call out to him to wake up, completely oblivious to the stares she was getting.

Umbridge took a step towards her and was about to speak but Serena's head snapped up at the slight movement, her bi-colored eyes filled with hatred; she looked at the people in the front accusingly, an angry sneer of revulsion etched on her normally peaceful face. “YOU! You did this to him!!!”

Fudge frowned, and then smirked, his wand pointed in her direction. “I don't know who the hell you are but so what? The –boy- got what he deserved! Hogwarts now belongs to Umbridge, and consequently, the Dark Lord!” He started to laugh maniacally, as well as the other Death Eaters, until the ground started to shake dangerously.

With wide eyes he followed the trail of magic and his face drained of all colors when the girl's strange eyes pierced him with a penetrative

stare, her eyes flashing silver for just a second. But that second was just enough for him to know that she held his life in her hands.

“EXPULSOR!” she screamed in pure fury, and an abrupt dark blue wave of magic charged at him and knocked him down on the wall behind the teachers’ table. He collided with the stone wall and he fell unconscious at the blow.

Serena got up shakily, her fists held tightly at each of her sides. But she wasn’t shaking because of fear or energy depletion, oh no; she was shaking because she could now have her revenge.

“Hogwarts...” she started, her breathing labored, and her voice gone back to its normal timbre.

Everyone was just frozen. Lucius Malfoy clearly didn’t know what to do; he seemed torn between killing this girl on the spot, bring her to his master or run for his life. Either way, the other Death Eaters were waiting for him to make a decision.

“How dare you to attack one of us! How dare you to attack the owner of Hogwarts!!!” Umbridge seethed and cried out in a high pitched shout. “CRUCI-”

Serena interrupted her calmly, too calmly. “Finis Cantio.”

The red colored magic around Umbridge’s wand instantly died out, and to the woman’s horror, each time she tried to invoke the Cruciatus back it appeared and died out. “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE TO MY WAND, YOU BITCH?! What are you waiting for, you nitwits?! An invitation? GET HER!”

The Death Eaters seemed to snap out of it and raised their wands hurriedly.

Serena took a step towards them, and then another. “Hogwarts...” she started again, lifting her head higher this time so they could see her eyes. What flashed in them made them quiver.

“Hogwarts...**IS MINE!**” she screamed, **“IT WILL NEVER BE YOURS! NEVER!”**

She turned around swiftly. *"Come to me! Come to me Ssalazar!"*

Now it was pure chaos amongst the rank of Death Eaters. This girl was a Parselmouth?! What in the world was going on?! Who or what had she just called???

Severus' heart almost stopped and he took a step back. Albus followed his movements from the corner of his eyes. The Potions Master was obviously scared out of his wits. It wasn't everyday people found out about another Parselmouth in the world, especially when one was your (ex) master, and the other the supposed savior of the Wizarding World.

So who was she? Who in the world was she?!

Lucius opened his mouth but closed it quickly when a sound, a hiss? was heard by everyone. The students, who were still under the Death Eaters' threats but didn't seem to care at the moment, shrieked and ran away to the side walls when the hissing got longer, deeper, darker and closer.

The Death Eaters were motionless. "WHAT DID SHE JUST CALL???" asked a panicked Umbridge. She, and certainly everybody else, weren't just prepared to see a Basilisk slowly and dangerously slither in the Great Hall towards its mistress and Harry Potter, who was still unconscious in the middle row between the tables.

"Oh God! HARRY!" Hermione shouted in fright and horror as the Basilisk lowered its huge head towards the boy. With everyone in such a state of pure terror, they never noticed that the Basilisk held its eyes closed.

Salazar ignored the screams of the humans; they were insignificant and he didn't even understand their babble anyway. He bent down towards the smell of his mistress' friend, the snake-child, or more like man-snake now, but the boy curiously wasn't responding to him.

"Man-ssnake? What are you doing on the floor, man-ssnake?" the Basilisk hissed curiously, but to others it seemed as if it was ready to eat the boy.

Harry's friends screamed when the silver haired girl turned around slightly, not willing to let the Death Eaters out of her sight, and hissed to the dangerous creature. "*Ssalazar, bring him to me. Be careful with him.*"

Hermione started to cry and hid her face in Ron's cloak. The red head hugged her closely to himself, if a little too tightly; he was scared for Harry and tears of fear and frustration fell on his freckled cheeks; they turned into ones of anger when the Basilisk lowered its head even more and opened its huge mouth above the boy.

"WHICH SIDE ARE YOU ON ANYWAY?!" Ron shouted at the girl controlling the dark creature, trying to prevent his best friend from being mercilessly eaten.

The Death Eaters were almost smirking, albeit nervously, but it seemed as if the girl was going to rid the world of Harry Potter after all.

Remus was being held back by Mad-Eye Moody and Dumbledore, and the Headmaster was surprisingly strong for his old age. "Let me go! Let me go damn you!!! It'll kill Harry! Stop it! I don't want to loose Harry! Not Harry too!"

The teachers looked at him sadly but even with his strong Werewolf senses and dormant powers he couldn't get out of the other two men's grasp.

He was angry at them, angry that they didn't even try to stop the Basilisk from descending onto Harry. The rational part of him flew out the window, because internally he knew that no spell could affect a Basilisk, its scales being too thick and preventing the absorption of any kind of magic.

Salazar found the wails around him to be quite frustrating but obeyed his mistress anyway. He bent down and carefully, as careful as a Basilisk could be, and scooped up the limp boy in his mouth.

More wails resounded around him and his tail twitched at their annoyance. He glided towards his mistress and let her gently pry the black haired boy from his jaws. She hugged him tightly and, to

everyone's astonishment, she kissed his scar tenderly...and didn't draw back.

A small silver light enveloped her and something flashed on her brow for just a second, but nobody saw what it was. The light poured from her body to concentrate on her lips, and the little dot of light entered Harry's scar.

She drew back as he twitched and groaned, signaling that he was waking up. Harry felt disoriented as he got onto his feet; he no longer hurt from the Cruciatus, so that only meant one thing.

"Sserena?" He blinked a few times, even with his glasses on, and quickly regained his equilibrium.

The silver haired girl sighed in relief. *"You can never sstay out of trouble for jusst one day, can't you? Either way, I've come to claim what iss mine, what hass always been mine ssince the day I wass born."*

Harry smiled cheekily. *"You ssure are sslow! Did you really have to wait a thoussand yearss to do thiss?"*

The tense atmosphere between them dissipated and she chuckled silently, moving closer to him. They embraced tightly, as if they were afraid of being separated. *"I'm glad you're alright, Harry. When I ssaw you under the effect of the cursse, I..."* she whispered shakily in his chest.

He shushed her and caressed her long silver hair tenderly. *"Sssh It'ss over now."*

She nodded, the anger now completely gone to make place for this steely determination she felt before. The scene for the others was slightly more disturbing, though; seeing two people converse in Parseltongue was a tad too abnormal for them.

She turned around, and the enemy took a step backwards. A tense Salazar was at her side and a sneering Harry at the other, making a pretty impressive picture.

“Dolores Umbridge, you are proven guilty of creating a false document concerning the true ownership of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry and being a Death Eater working in the name of Voldemort. What do you have to say for your defense?” Serena asked with no trace of pity in her voice.

The woman stuttered at the mention of His name but glared at the meddlesome girl soon after. She brandished the contract with the Hogwarts seal on it victoriously. “Ha! You mean this? You can’t destroy it! It’s the deed of Hogwarts and it gives me the right to control this infernal castle any way I want!”

Serena stayed undeterred by the threat and looked at the contract blankly. She waved her hand towards it. “Ignis Sagita.”

Next thing Umbridge knew, there was a fire arrow piercing the false contract straight in the middle and setting it up in flames.

The teachers gasped and Umbridge recoiled. “NOOO! The contract!!! It was supposed to be indestructible! How did you-?”

Serena glared darkly at her, making the infernal woman shut up.

“Simple. It’s because I have the original deed of Hogwarts,” she retrieved two rolled up pieces of parchments from her cloak and brought them to eye level, “right here.”

Umbridge started to laugh, pointing a digit in the two pieces’ direction. “Those two ripped pieces of parchment? The original contract? Ha! Ha! Ha! Don’t make me laugh! Those are just old papers and anyway, Hogwarts’ original record was never found!”

Serena smirked darkly, making her green and blue eyes sparkle dangerously. “Of course they’ve never been found. One needed two special keys to open two special vaults to find these two special parchments.”

She once again retrieved something from her pockets and lifted them to eye level. “Behold the vault keys of Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor! And I am their direct HEIR!”

She threw the two sealed rolls in the air at the same time she spoke, and then cried out: **“RESIGNO!”**

The seal around both parchments broke and they unrolled in a flurry of paper, still floating in the air without the help of any levitating incantation.

“PROTAHO OCCULTUS!” Both ripped pieces mended together to form only one and the yellowed parchment glowed brightly, making the Death Eaters back away in fright and everyone close their eyes.

When they reopened them, they could only stare at the two apparitions who were embracing the girl protectively. They looked so real! But who were they?

Albus’ eyes widened when they turned around to face the head table, both men’s eyes looking through them; this was an original contract indeed, and if the girl was telling the truth, those two were-

“We are the two greatest of the Hogwarts Four,” both voices started at the same time as if chanting, “the Original Founders and legal Creators and Owners of Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. We are the Lion and the Snake, courage and cunningness reunited, we are Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor.”

Exclamations of shock rang through the Great Hall and spread like wildfire. Harry was in awe in front of the two visions. “So, they are Gryffindor and Slytherin...” he whispered softly with wide eyes. He noticed, with a humorous smirk, that he looked more like Slytherin in his looks than his ancestor Godric Gryffindor. ‘Malfoy must be feeling ill right now...both of them!’

Serena concentrated solely on her fathers and she closed her eyes; tears escaped from their prison and glided down her cheeks. Salazar, the Basilisk, who had stayed immobile and silent, nudged her back gently for reassurance.

Their voices, it had been so, so long since she had heard them. The feeling that invaded her made her heart cry out for them more than ever.

The holograms went on, their face betraying nothing excepted for the need to be respected They were both wearing their most expensive cloaks and the way they stood side by side amicably baffled everyone; weren't Slytherin and Gryffindor supposed to be loathed enemies?

"To prevent a conflict about whom is the true heir of the school, this contract has been created with the consent of Rowena Ravenclaw and Helga Hufflepuff, who left us all of our rights to Hogwarts." Both men stopped at the same time as if to take a breath and observe the people around.

They both frowned deeper. "Until the two pieces of the contract are found, a conflict will probably have already started. Who, between the indirect heirs of either Gryffindor or Slytherin bloodline will become the owner of the castle? 'Tis simple; only the heir of BOTH shall have her due. Our experiment, now our daughter, has within her our blood in its purest form, and along comes an extraordinary power not to be trifled with."

Both turned around, as if the images had been programmed to do that, and their hard gazes turned into warm and loving ones. Their hands moved together towards her and they gave the impression of caressing the girls' cheeks.

"Baby, I know you can do it, I believe in you and I will always love you," Godric spoke up calmly.

"Serenity, you make me proud everyday. Show them what the result of our combined blood can do. Show them our true nature!" Salazar said grandly and compellingly.

Serena nodded back at them even though she was still crying and even though they were mere holograms and didn't really see her for real.

They glanced around gravely one last time before they simply disappeared. The parchment, which had somewhat been ignored during this bewildering announcement, sparkled one last time and fell lifelessly back into the girl's hands.

She sniffed, her bangs covering her eyes, and rubbed her eyes with the back of her hand in a determined motion. Her eyes hardened as she looked back at the frightened Death Eaters. "I am Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin, awakened after a thousand years of imposed sleep to regain my rights to my legacy. You will either forfeit your lives into my hands or suffer the consequences."

The dark servants snapped out of it and they started to panic, looking everywhere for an open place to run. They still had their wands pointed at the teachers, though, and used this to their advantage.

Bellatrix Lestrange took off her hood and in an instant she had Remus Lupin at wand-point, smirking in triumph in Harry's direction. "HA! Tough luck, Potter! Let us pass or else the Werewolf is doomed!"

Harry's breath caught in his throat, Serena froze with a glare, and Remus had no choice but to stay put because of the wand now pointed on his neck; that didn't stop him from growling menacingly at Bellatrix, though.

The female Death Eater looked back at Harry with a haughty smirk. "What will it be, Potter? And don't bother to hide your concern; I know that you hold this –dark creature- in your heart. Nevertheless, I must admit that I am rather tempted to kill him right now. You've always had a preference for dangerous people, haven't you, Harry? My idiot cousin is proof enough. Too bad he's not here to see you now. I –so-enjoyed hexing him and seeing him fall into the veil with that surprised look–"

"SHUT UP!!! SHUT UP YOU BITCH! DON'T SPEAK ABOUT SIRIUS LIKE THAT! SIRIUS WAS THE BEST FAMILY FIGURE WHO APPEARED IN MY LIFE!" Harry screamed in fury, and his magic burst out of him in uncontrolled blasts, throwing Bellatrix backwards and onto the wall with a loud thud. She slid down the wall to join the still unconscious Fudge on the stone floor.

This seemed to make everything go into slow motion. The Death Eaters sprung into action, trying to get away. The sudden movement made Salazar tense and in an instant, the Basilisk was blocking the

way out by the main entrance of the Great Hall, his sense of smell helping him move across the room.

Albus had already secured the side entrance with the aurors from the Order and was trying to petrify some of them. The students shouted and screamed in fright and tried to stay as near the walls as they could, the oldest brandishing their wands blindly to make the Lord's servants go away; Harry was helping them and protecting them efficiently with the old shielding spells *Clipeo* and *Praemunitio*.

Serena had enough of the pure chaos in the Great Hall; hexes and curses were flying around, literally pouring onto the walls and further destroying the ancient wards placed onto Hogwarts by the Founders and herself.

She turned around swiftly, and at the right time too; the Umbridge woman was going to curse Harry from behind while he was occupied with other Death Eaters.

"ENOUGH!" she screamed in rage.

They clearly didn't have the intention to surrender, so they had already sealed their fate.

"Ssalazar At your left, behind Harry! OPEN YOUR EYESSS AND KILL THE BITCH!"

The loud hissing made some people flinch and run away from her. The Basilisk blocked the doors with his tail and lifted itself high with the help of its body to look imposing; Salazar was ready to strike, swaying from left to right.

It smelled in which direction the foul scent of the woman was coming from and concentrated its glare to become deadly in this direction only.

Umbridge was none the wiser and gaped at the huge snake; she had forgotten that its glare was dangerous, and sometimes deadly even at its present age.

"NOW SSALAZAR!!!"

The eyes opened...and Umbridge fell.

Everyone froze in horror, mainly the 'friends' of Umbridge, and Salazar took his chance by lowering the power of his glare. He directed his sight only on the dark robed people and those who closed their eyes or tried to escape were stricken viciously with his tail, rendering them unconscious with a few broken bones as a bonus.

Soon, no Death Eaters were left standing and the Basilisk closed its eyes and slithered towards his mistress protectively, where Harry joined them tiredly.

"Oh yes, before I forget. Albus Dumbledore will remain the Headmaster. Take that, you bitch." She spat at the lifeless body of Umbridge.

Silence and stillness greeted her statement.

Chapter 22: The Dog Star

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It was complete pandemonium in the Great Hall. There was no other word for it. The students had been immediately sent to their Common Room after the –incident-, and representative from the ministry, good ones, had been sent to gather the remaining, yet wounded or frozen, Death Eaters.

People from the Daily Prophet and every other newspaper were trying to get a glimpse of the inside of Hogwarts and its inhabitants, mainly Harry Potter and the one rumored to be the daughter of Salazar Slytherin and Godric Gryffindor themselves.

As always, a secret in Hogwarts never remained one for so long. And the news of the Minister being a Death Eater had spread panic amongst the wizarding world. Were people in the ministry that rotten?

Serenity watched the aurors gather the wounded and unconscious Death Eaters from the floor from her post in the chair of the headmaster. Harry was standing beside her with a grave face and Salazar kept quiet from his place behind them.

The teachers were obviously helping the aurors since the huge dark creature didn't let anyone near his mistress, nor the Potter boy. Everyone was itching to ask them some questions but the girl simply refused to talk anymore: she was noticeably uneasy and tense when there were too many people around. But why?

Remus was dying to check up on Harry; the boy did suffer two Cruciatus curses at the same time but now he looked just vigorous and as healthy as ever. "Albus, do you think she's the one who trained Harry? You know, the different spells and all?" The werewolf asked silently to the headmaster while glancing in their way once in a while.

Just about everyone was doing it anyway, eyeing the silver haired girl with either mistrust, fear or awe. The Basilisk behind her was only eyed in pure terror, though.

Albus, for once, was at a complete loss. "It is very probable, my dear boy. But even I had not foreseen this development. This...truly is mind boggling," the old man answered back in an equal whisper.

Serena watched the development with keen eyes, and she felt Harry tense momentarily beside her. She glanced up at him but he was looking at something else in the Great Hall; following the direction he was looking at, the silver haired girl narrowed her bi-colored eyes and spoke up, startling every adult in the place into halting whatever they were doing. "Bring that woman to me."

The adults were confused and slightly scared, and they looked around to know to whom she was talking to. She looked directly at two aurors who were handling a frozen female Death Eater and they gulped once they were sure she was addressing them out of everyone present. They didn't budge.

She narrowed her eyes. "Are you deaf? Bring. That woman. To me!"

Salazar suddenly lifted his head, golden eyes remaining closed, and he hissed dangerously in their direction as if sensing the stress signals in his mistress' voice.

Everyone shrieked and stepped back, until she lifted a hand and hissed softly to her pet. She sighed and waved her hand carelessly in the direction of the exit. The doors of the Great Hall closed with a 'Bang!' before they could all assess the situation. Panic spread fast; they were trapped inside!

"Salazar, you petrified a woman not too long ago. Bring her to me. She is near the exit door."

Gasps reverberated in the room when they heard the distinctive Parseltongue hissing and when the Basilisk slowly slithered down the three steps and between the tables in the direction of the two still frozen aurors.

Albus motioned for his teachers to back away slowly, wondering where the hell was Fawkes when he needed the Phoenix the most.

The two aurors shouted in terror and swiftly dropped the Death Eater in an un-ceremonial heap on the hard floor, running away to join their comrades who were leaning on the wall as much as they could.

Salazar didn't appear to be bothered by them in the least and closed his jaw around the cloak of the unconscious woman, bringing her back to his mistress and dropping the person in front of Serena as if she was a sack of potatoes.

Serena could feel Harry's magic getting wilder by the second; it was to be expected, because in front of her now stood the petrified form of Bellatrix Lestranges.

Glasses on the teachers' table started to vibrate and, one by one, they shattered loudly, spilling their forgotten liquid on the table.

"Harry, reign in your magic."

Remus' eyes widened when he heard the girl telling Harry to calm down. "Harry's doing this intentionally."

Snape turned to look at him with a sneer. "What do you mean, Lupin?"

Remus glanced at him for a brief second but his gaze locked back onto the boy he considered as his cub. "Harry is so angry at Bellatrix that he is intentionally unleashing wild magic," Remus answered to the Potions Master.

Snape snorted at him. "Don't be a fool, Lupin! Wild magic cannot be controlled. It is merely a burst of magic resulting from an intense feeling or when a person isn't skilled enough with his or her magic. I'd choose the latter with Potter." Snape shook his head in mockery. "Such a waste of good magic."

Remus was about to retort when Albus softly spoke up, startling the both of them. "This is intentional, Severus. Harry's done it before, although he probably wasn't aware that it was what he wanted. And we do not know the extent of the things that girl has been teaching him. I always kept a record of Harry's magical powers, but now I'm

not so sure anymore. At least he now knows how to block his mind from Voldemort.”

Everyone winced at –the- name, and the aurors who weren’t with the Order vaguely wondered what Albus was talking about. Could the Dark Lord invade Potter’s mind? And no one knew of this?! Preposterous!

Serena eyed the fallen Death Eater with disgust and bent down, lifting her by the back of the cloak so she could clearly see the woman’s face. Harry snarled. “Let me kill her!”

Remus gasped and the others’ eyes widened. Harry had never expressed such a raw feeling of hate before and truly looked as if he was really going to do it.

The girl ignored him, however. “*Morio*,” she hissed calmly, and the adults gasped when Bellatrix started to move and wake up.

“That’s impossible! They are no known incantations to wake up someone who has been petrified by a Basilisk! The only remedy known is a potion!” Snape exclaimed with a look of astonishment etched on his face.

Albus stroked his long beard passively. “Maybe they are no known incantations because it has to be said in Parseltongue?”

At the same time, Bellatrix’ eyes snapped open and she tried to push away from the grasp she was in and away from the girl. “LET ME GO YOU LITTLE BITCH!” she screamed in anger and started to struggle madly against her captor as if she was an enraged animal.

When a fist almost slammed in her face, Serena growled impatiently. “EXANIMO!”

Bellatrix opened her mouth but nothing came out except for a gasp. The female Death Eater gripped her neck and started to choke as if she couldn’t find the way to breathe properly and when the need to find air became too big she fell on the floor and pounded on the stones weakly to try to get her point across.

Serena leaned back in her chair and let the woman suffer a bit to calm her ardor. "This spell will kill you if I don't lift it soon. It stops a person from breathing, a much essential need. If you do not cooperate I will let the spell continue what it has been created for," the silver haired girl said carelessly.

Her one green eye seemed to glow with a need for punishment, and whereas the adults turned around at the sight or cried out in shock, Harry watched the show eagerly with a feral grin.

They all watched as Lestranges nodded as fast as she could and as the girl muttered the end incantation spell. Bellatrix inhaled loudly and rapidly, trying to fill her lungs as much as possible.

Serena stayed unfazed by the pitiful woman on her knees in front of her and addressed her: "Now, I want to now where Voldemort hides and you –will- tell me."

Bellatrix shot her a dirty look and sneered. "Ha! You can torture me all you like, but I will never betray my Master!" she exclaimed loudly and proudly.

Serena raised an eyebrow, got up and started to walk around Bellatrix; the older woman followed her movements closely, trying to hide her dread. "What are you do-"

"Silentium."

Bellatrix' hands went to her throat for a second time because no sound came out of it when she tried to continue her phrase.

"Your inability to cooperate is most frustrating" the heiress stated, and Bellatrix gasped silently when the girl gripped her forehead tightly with one hand. Bellatrix started to struggle again in the grip but the attempt was futile when she felt a great pull in her mind.

Serena let the woman go with a disdainful look and wiped her hand on her cloak while Bellatrix fell on the floor –again-, gasping for breath. It was as if something had pried her mind open with such force that she had momentarily seen stars and everything had

blacked out. "What -huff- have you done -huff- to me?!" she panted angrily.

Serena shrugged carelessly. "I know everything I wanted to know. You are of no use to me anymore. EXPELLO!"

Bellatrix shrieked as a force slammed her backwards and she fell in front of the aurors who were previously holding her in a complete daze because of the forceful landing.

Harry watched Serenity in a mix of anger and curiosity. "Why didn't you kill her??? She deserves it! She killed my Godfather! Why can't you order Salazar to eat her???" he asked furiously.

She raised an eyebrow and sent him a look that promised a talk later about what she had done to the cousin of his Godfather and what she now knew, and then she grinned roguishly in the direction of her familiar. "Are you nuts? I wasn't going to feed Salazar her sorry carcass. I don't need my familiar to go all sick on me."

Harry opened his mouth, looked at the Basilisk and closed it again. "I see your point," he grimaced. "But Bellatrix has to pay for her crimes! And the Dementors are no longer under the control of the ministry so she can't get the Kiss."

Serena nodded, while watching the aurors secure a sneering and struggling Bellatrix that still found the way to insult everyone around her and look at the silver haired girl indomitably.

Said girl seemed to nod to herself and waved a hand in Bellatrix' direction. "Corporis Gravititas."

The woman gasped, stopped her struggling and buckled under her weight with a pallid face.

They all looked at her, wondering what she had done to Lestranges. Serena didn't explain. She got up and motioned for Harry to follow her with a renewed determination.

Salazar's head shot up as soon as he felt his mistress move away and he slithered next to her protectively, and effectively stopping any

attempt of the other wizards present to even try to come near her or the man-snake.

“Harry!” Remus called out desperately.

The dark haired boy shot him an apologetic look and followed the girl out of the Great Hall, leaving a dozen of silent and lost looking wizards.

Bellatrix coughed weakly, making all heads turn in her direction. Albus stroked his beard again and whispered to himself: “Corporis Gravititas? Physical discomfort?”

Mad-Eye turned to him with a grim expression. “So she cursed Lestranges?”

Albus nodded. “It sure looks like it. I think this spell is supposed to make the receiver permanently sick, but not enough to kill, just indispose the person significantly.”

Tonks looked a little green in the face, and it wasn’t one of her Metamorphmagus ability. “This is a little too much action for me to take in just one day. Let us put those Death Eaters in a secure cell and go come back here to sleep. I, personally, will make a detour home so I can use my Pensieve. My head is about to burst and all I have in mind is that girl who is a total enigma.”

She got several mutters of total agreement in return.

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Harry followed his girlfriend, for lack of a better word, in the empty corridors. Not even the Prefects had been allowed to go out of the Common Rooms, so they truly were alone, exactly what the heiress wanted.

Harry followed dutifully and silently, but after a while he noticed that they weren’t taking the right path to go to the Chamber of Secrets. “Serena, where are we going?”

She spared him a short glance and continued to walk toward her destination. "We're going to my personal chambers, not THE Chamber. It's heavily warded so not even your Headmaster knows of it, I'm sure."

She stopped momentarily in front of a random wall in the middle of the corridor and when Harry was about to ask what she was doing, she put a hand on it and muttered an incantation. An archway appeared in the wall, big enough so the Basilisk could slither inside no problem. Harry was surprised.

"Ssalazar, I think you know the way back to the Chamber of Ssecretss. There iss a sset of pipess leading sstraight to it. I'll ssummon you if I need you." She thanked her familiar.

Salazar seemed to nod and went inside. *"I will wait for your call, mistress. Take care."*

When the end of Salazar's tail disappeared down the tunnel, she muttered another incantation and the archway closed as if nothing had ever happened. "Follow me, Harry."

After a few other minutes and a lot of turning around later, which confused Harry about where they actually were in the castle, Serena stopped in front of an old, unmoving portrait.

All there was in it was the picture of a silver moon and nothing else, and Harry studied the picture curiously. "I think I've seen that photo before. But there never was anyone in it."

Serena nodded. "Very astute of you to notice this, especially when this portrait is encircled by Notice-Me-Not charms. Indeed, no personages from the other portraits can enter this one. *Hogwartssss.*" She hissed the password in Parseltongue and Harry lifted one eyebrow playfully.

"Pretty original password. It's obvious but no one's ever thought of that!"

She shrugged with a small smirk as the portrait opened and they entered in her personal quarters. When the door closed behind them,

Harry missed the fact that a winged unicorn appeared slowly in front of the moon, yet remained unmoving. It was the proof that there was indeed someone in the rooms behind the portrait...but nobody knew that, of course.

Harry watched the place in awe; there was no dust at all, as if the place had been self sustaining all these years. The furniture looked pretty old and expensive, but in excellent condition.

From what he could see, the living room was decorated in red and green, and her bedroom was decorated in gold and silver. He looked at every little piece of knick-knacks he could find with interest and wonderment but when Serena sat down on a couch he straightened and sat down in front of her.

She crossed her hands and looked at him very solemnly and Harry couldn't help but wonder what seemed so important. "I know where Voldemort is hiding."

Well, that certainly got his attention. His eyes widened and he fidgeted.

She went on; "I found pretty important information when I performed Legilimency on the female Death Eater. Part of this is the location of Voldemort. The other..." she stopped and sighed.

Harry fidgeted again, part in curiosity, part in dread of a bad news. "What did you find?" he pressed on.

She closed her eyes. "The dog star is alive."

Harry gave her a weird look and furrowed his brow. "What are you talking about?"

She opened her eyes and looked straight in his as a hint.

His breath hitched in his throat. 'Dog star, dog star...I can't be, can it? He- he died! But...'

Hope lit his face as he gazed at her with uncertainty. She nodded and he sank further in the couch, having troubles to prevent the tears that threatened to fall.

She sighed and got up, only to sit back down beside Harry to give him some support. He quickly latched on her and, for the first time since the “accident” happened, he cried.

He let everything out, his fears, his worries, his anger, everything he felt since he learned about the prophecy and his destiny, the entire life he led for the others. He cried his heart out.

She stroked his back lovingly and silently, letting him empty his swarming emotions out.

“Oh God! Sirius!” he choked between two sobs.

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Chapter 23: Dogfather

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“What did you see?” Harry asked silently.

The atmosphere was calm and both Harry and Serena were very tired. The boy had finally calmed down and now the reality of what Serena had previously announced was imprinted in his mind and assimilated.

Serena leaned in the couch and looked at the ceiling. “For one thing, Voldemort is hiding in Riddle Manor, no surprise there.”

Harry gave her a look that clearly said ‘No way!’

“But I thought that Riddle Manor had been fully searched!” the boy exclaimed.

Serena nodded patiently and smirked a little. “Of course, but it’s been searched by the incompetents from the ministry, and not by two Parselmouths. Riddle Manor’s wards have probably been relocated somewhere inside, where the Aurors can’t possibly go; maybe a secret entrance. Voldemort’s lair is underground, under the manor itself, and only the Death Eaters can Apparate there. The entrance of the passageway is very rarely used since Riddle stays underground most of the time and since he can simply Apparate outside. But the Aurors don’t know that, and they wouldn’t know the exact emplacement of this hidden tunnel so apparating would be out of question.”

She stopped to think about it for a moment.

“All in all, it’s the perfect place to hide. First, because it’s so obvious no one would think about it, and second because the complex wards are inside, and not outside. It’s completely open; we could walk in there right now and not be bothered at all.”

Harry stayed silent while he stored this very useful information for later use. Serena sighed; she knew what he wanted to know. “As for

the Dog Star...Sirius..." she started solemnly, and Harry's head snapped in her direction. He was now all ears and waiting for any bits or pieces of information that would help localize his Godfather.

She mentally cringed. "He's in Riddle Manor."

That hit Harry like a ton of bricks and she heard him exhale loudly. When she took a peep at him he had put his head in his hands. "How? Why him? Has he not suffered enough? Is he being tortured?"

Serena brought his head to rest on her chest and she stroked his hair soothingly. The day's events were starting to have its toll on both of them. "From what I've seen in Lestrage's mind, Voldemort had planned this all along, to make Sirius fall into the veil. It was so easy for him to enter the ministry and install this special Portkey in the shape of a veil, but it's a wonder he didn't spot the Prophecy along the way. Bellatrix hasn't seen Sirius recently but the last time she heard of him Voldemort kept him away from everybody and he was still stupefied."

Harry blinked. "He's keeping Sirius stupefied? That's not like him to do that... I thought he would've tortured Sirius for sure, at the least."

Serena nodded thoughtfully. "Maybe so, but your godfather is still his trump card against you and I think he wants Sirius to be in the best shape possible so he can torture him more in front of you, if he has to."

Harry's gaze darkened. "Yeah, that would be more like him. What a sadistic bastard!"

Serena gave him an encouraging smile and got up, only to march to her bedroom. "Well anyhow, we still have a fair advantage against that Dark Lord and he's missing a couple of Death Eaters, as well as Fudge and Umbridge. That will surely piss him off. I don't think he'll like me since I've proved that Salazar Slytherin's ideals are way more different from what he first had thought."

She beckoned Harry to follow her and he did without any hesitation. The silver haired girl patted the empty space beside her and Harry lied down on his back on the huge king size bed.

She sighed tiredly and lied down on her side, her head and one hand resting on his chest. Harry's cheeks reddened slightly but he wound an arm around her smaller form; it felt so natural for him to do so that he smiled and even laid a daring kiss on her brow, a little unsure of how she would react to a real one.

She looked up at him with a shy smile and placed a kiss on his lips; he, of course, welcomed it and retaliated avidly. When air became an issue they separated, both with flushed faces and she hid her blushing face in his chest, which made him chuckle a little. "Harry?" she said tentatively.

His eyes started to drop and he hummed in acknowledgement.

"I love you."

He hummed again, half asleep, and without thinking he replied: "I love you too."

Then, his eyes widened and he craned his neck to look down at her so fast that the sleep shook out of him.

She giggled at him and pecked him on the lips. He relaxed in the bedding and hugged her tightly. When they finally fell asleep, Harry kept thinking that now things were going up and for the better.

He WOULD get his Godfather back and Sirius, Serena and him, and probably Remus too, would get themselves a nice house and live in peace, away from the annoying reporters from the Daily Prophet.

Harry smirked sadistically. If Sirius wanted to get rid of the Most Ancient and Noble House of Black, he wanted to have first dibs: killing Kreacher would be a satisfying achievement and no big loss to the world, as well as burning Sirius' mother's portrait and the entire house down in the process.

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Remus was still in his bed, half asleep from yesterday's particularly disturbing events when he heard with his Werewolf senses, although the sound was barely audible, a door creak open. He was instantly on

high alert and hid behind the closed door of his bedroom, wand in hand and ready to attack the intruder.

“Remus?”

The Werewolf blinked at the muffled, but very familiar voice of Harry Potter in his private chambers and he wrenched the door open. “HARRY!?” He ran to the living room, ready to say hello to the boy in front of the entry portrait but Harry wasn’t there.

“Remus?” Harry asked again, standing in the kitchen’s entry.

The adult’s golden eyes widened in joy when he saw Harry, though he was disturbed about the fact that Harry was coming out of the kitchen, and he gasped silently and took a few steps back in apprehension when he spotted the person behind Harry.

The silver haired girl paid no heed to his baffled expression and sat down on Remus’ couch as if it belonged to her. Remus almost snorted. If she really was who she said she was, everything in Hogwarts belonged to her anyway.

Harry sat down beside her and motioned for Remus to sit down in front of them, which he did slowly and without lifting his gaze from her. “Harry, are you okay?” the cursed Werewolf asked worriedly.

Harry smiled a little to ease the tension. “I’m fine Remus, and I’ll be great in just a couple of days maximum, if things go our way. Why don’t you lean back on the couch and relax? She won’t bite you, you know,” the boy teased and Remus did so automatically.

A few minutes of heavy and uncomfortable silence followed. Remus was obviously too weirded out at the moment to speak so Serena got impatient and went straight to the point, making Remus jump slightly when she started to talk. “We know where Voldemort is and we want you to come with us for an ambush, Mr. Lupin.”

The Werewolf’s mouth opened and closed, his eyes widening at the revelation. “B-but! You should tell Dumbledore this! Not me!”

Harry shook his head negatively. "No. Only us three. We want to make a surprise attack on Tom and if there are too many people involved he will know of our plan immediately. We're not sure of this, but I don't think he knows that we know where he is hiding. He's going to be busy trying to gather the rest of his Death Eaters to notice us anyway; that's when we'll strike." Harry explained, and Remus still looked unsure.

"But what do you want me to do? The Prophecy clearly says that it will be you who will defeat the Dark Lord."

Harry nodded solemnly, but he couldn't help but to let a smile out. "You won't be fighting Tom. I need you for something else; you'll have to find someone in Riddle Mansion, or rather, in the underground tunnels of Riddle Mansion. He's being kept prisoner and I don't want Voldemort to use him against me if something goes wrong. He suffered enough as it is, and we think he's being kept under a special petrifying spell. You'll have to use your knowledge and help him as soon as possible."

Remus looked at Harry weirdly, not understanding where the boy was getting at. "Voldemort has taken someone as a hostage? Why wasn't the Order aware of this fact?"

Harry sneered momentarily, that is until the heiress put a hand on his arm; the dark haired boy visibly calmed down, and Remus understood the impact she had on Harry and felt suddenly more at ease in her presence.

"That's because I also wasn't aware of this fact until last night. Serena obtained precious information from Bellatrix' mind. Remus, Sirius is alive."

It took a couple of seconds for Remus to actually assimilate the news, and when it all clicked his golden eyes widened considerably, he let out a whoosh of air as if he had been kicked in the stomach and he slouched in the couch he was sitting on, head in his hands. "Oh Merlin! Oh God! Sirius!" he exclaimed between the heavy breaths he was taking.

Harry smiled sadly and looked at his girlfriend, who gave him a loving smile back. "I've had about the same reaction as you, Remus. But it's true; Serena saw it all via Legilimency."

Said girl scowled. "I still have to get back at this Professor Snape you told me about for using Occlumency on you at full power when you were a novice at this art. You could have gotten brain damage for that!"

Remus blinked and looked at Harry with red rimmed eyes; he was obviously trying to stop his tears before they fell. "Severus used Occlumency on you when you couldn't retaliate?! The son-of-a-bitch! When he was still training you he had said that you weren't trying at all! You can't learn Occlumency by barging in the mind of another like that! It's totally illegal! Even Occlumency in itself is considered a dark art anyway..." Remus muttered angrily, but Harry swatted it off.

"Let it go, Remus. Serena will probably 'avenge' me even if I don't want her to so he's bound to feel it anyway. He may be on the good side but I don't think that his hate for me will change any time soon."

Serena smirked sadistically and rubbed her hands together. "Oh, I think he'll change soon enough! After all, he'll have to be civilized if he ever wants to take a peep out of father Salazar's potions journals."

She cackled like crazy and Harry laughed nervously. "You're completely barmy, you know that?"

She merely grinned at him, making Remus laugh at their antics.

"So Remy, will you help us?" Harry asked with a determined face and a wink.

The Werewolf blinked at the new nickname but smiled back warmly and equally determinedly at the Boy-who-Lived. "You can count me in. I would've gone even though you wouldn't have told me about Sirius. You know I care about you a lot, Harry. I'm glad you're finally talking to me again, though I now understand your reasons."

He got up and kneeled in front of Serena, who looked back at him unsurely. He was the second person to approach her so near, but she understood what Harry saw in the man.

"I want to thank you too, young lady. Without you I think Harry would have transformed into a ball of evil desperation and what you did to help him, I will never forget. You helped him more in a couple of months than Dumbledore in all the years Harry's been here. You have my trust, and my friendship, if you are willing to accept friendship from a dark creature such as me."

Her gentle smile lit the room and she clasped his hands in hers. "You can call me Serena, I would be honored. And if Werewolves are considered to be dark creatures, well, their human counterparts certainly aren't. And anyway, you're calling yourself dark in front of the girl who has a Basilisk as a familiar."

Remus chuckled, his cheeks taking on a pink hue. "Too true. I forgot for a moment."

Serena nodded. "That's what I wanted. Anyway, we will deal with Hogwarts' problems later. Right now, we have to focus on Voldemort and think about our infiltration plan."

Harry continued, his face now serious. "We have to know where Sirius is being held and if anybody is guarding him. I know you're good, Remus, but I just wouldn't be able to bear losing you to some Death Eater. Maybe I could lift my mental wall for an instant and try to delve into Tom's mind?"

Remus looked at him with an outraged expression that clearly showed what he thought of this idea. "Absolutely no bloody way! I won't let you be at the mercy of that psychopath even for a second!"

"There might be another way..." Serena said softly and they both looked at her questioningly.

Harry shook his head with a foreboding air. "Tell me you're not thinking about bloody Sybill Trelawney!"

Her eyes widened slightly and she shook her head negatively. "That crazy Divination woman? No way. I was more thinking along the lines of fire-reading."

Seeing their confused faces, she explained further. "There's a spell for that. Well, at least, I have a spell for that. It's one of those spells that are a part of me, you know..." She gave Harry a pointed look and he understood.

It was one of her spells, one she had created long ago and one nobody else was able to do, like the Ignis Sagita: the flame arrow.

Remus looked on between both of them, not really understanding what they were talking about, but he was content on listening for the moment. He would soon enough get to know her better himself.

She turned toward him. "Do you know where I could have fire without endangering the environment, Mr. Lupin?"

"Call me Remus, please. I don't really care of being reminded of my age," he joked, and then seemed to think about what she asked.

"Dumbledore will see us if we go outside, and I think those rabid reporters from the Daily Prophet are still in the entourage."

Harry shuddered at the thought and grimaced.

Remus grinned at him and went on. "Does the fire have to be big?" he asked the silver haired girl.

She shook her head. "Not really, no."

He grinned again. "Well then, why don't you use the fireplace? I'll just block the Floo network and you'll have it all too yourself."

Serena nodded as he got up and muttered a spell, waving his wand in front of the fireplace. "There, it's done. Do whatever you have to do."

She knelt in front of the small fire and closed her eyes, her hands resting against her chest. "Ignispicium!"

She was suddenly thrown away from the world of the living and somewhere into a world of dreams and visions.

Harry and Remus gasped and stepped backward as the fire suddenly flared up as if it was alive and take a darker red tint instead of the dull orange.

“I think I’ll have to get used to that weird magic of hers, eh?” Remus muttered to the younger boy. Harry looked up at him with a smirk.

All the while, she had opened her orbs and was now gazing at the dancing fire through vacant eyes, seemingly in a trance. She saw him, she saw Sirius, and he was still frozen in a damp cell. No one was guarding him, excellent.

She tried to direct her gaze elsewhere. Voldemort looked very angry indeed while he vented his anger on some of his followers. His mouth, if one could even call it a mouth, kept moving but no sound came out. Nonetheless, she could see that he was going to move on pretty soon.

She tried to direct her gaze elsewhere and for a split second everything went black and a face suddenly appeared in front of her, vanishing just as fast. It disoriented her and she felt as if she was going to be sick.

‘What’s going on?!’ she cried out in the darkness that followed, completely lost. That girl had looked so familiar! Serena closed her eyes tightly when the pressure became unbearable in her head.

“...na...”

“...rena...”

“...Serena...”

“SERENA!”

Her eyes snapped open and she moaned when the sunlight streaming from a nearby window blinded her and made her head pound. She heard Remus mutter “Nox!” and opened her eyes again only to see Harry’s concerned face inches from her own.

She found out she was lying on her back, not even aware of when she fell backward from her kneeling position. "Harry?" she winced a little until the pounding headache went away.

Remus was at their side in an instant as she sat up and rubbed her head. "What happened Serena? Was this supposed to happen?" Harry asked worriedly, and she shook her head.

"I saw him; we can carry on with our plan right away before it's too late." She got up without a problem as Harry and Remus nodded at each other.

"I'm going to get some things, come on Harry." The boys walked away to get prepared while Serena waited for them in the living room. She gazed at them out the corner of her eyes but couldn't help to rub her eyes and close them tightly.

'Who was that girl? She had such fierce violet eyes...Why am I seeing those things, these people as if I knew them?' But they were only that: mere flashes and nothing more.

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Chapter 24: Rescue

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Remus discovered that Hogwarts had much more passageways than he and the Marauders first thought as they strolled in the one from his kitchen. He also discovered the newly improved Marauder's Map and studied it carefully, not that Serena needed it to get around, which astounded the Werewolf.

That girl seemed to know Hogwarts like the back of her hands and with her eyes closed, and each time they passed the exit of another passage she was able to tell where it precisely led. If things had been calmer, he would've laughed at the thought of Snape not knowing the existence of those hidden entries, as well as Dumbledore.

"These passages were only catalogued on one piece of paper and unknown to everyone except Salazar, Godric and me. I still have it; I think it's now in the Chamber of Secrets. It's the Blueprint of Hogwarts, of the entire castle and ground," Serena explained carefully while Remus was awed at the knowledge.

They made many twists and turns and Harry got curious. "Serena, you once told me that you were able to...how do you call it again? Ah yes! Teleport, out of Hogwarts without any trouble. So why don't we?"

Serena shook her head negatively. "Not now. I could if I would, but the wards have been remodelled, toyed and tampered with so much in all these years that I don't know what the effects will be if I decided to teleport. I don't want our plan to fail because we get caught or something. We have to act as secretly as possible."

Remus looked at her and evaded the torch she summoned wandlessly; the fire on the other she had in her hand was dwindling, so she set it aside and called forth for the flames to engulf the new one. Halfway through, she had called forth Salazar in Parseltongue, who rapidly came to his mistress by means of another tunnel. The Basilisk's eyes remained closed and Remus had to learn to deal with the enormous creature being a friendly one.

“We’ve arrived at the end of the tunnel,” she suddenly warned them, and pushed not a wooden door but an entrance made of dirt and earth. She pressed on it and Harry and Remus gaped as they recognized this place as being the Forbidden Forest.

Serena motioned for them to follow her out of the limits of Hogwarts so she could teleport them all to Riddle Mansion. Salazar opened the way for them and slithered around, enjoying the brief freedom and his first time outside.

He even caught himself a gnome and made himself a quick snack. Harry and Remus’ gazes crossed as they pulled out their tongues at the sound the gnome made while it was being swallowed entirely. Serena didn’t look hindered by it in the least.

“I didn’t know that the Founders made a secret passage leading to the Forbidden Forest! Wasn’t it a dangerous task, though?” Harry asked curiously, his wand up and poised to attack anything that should appear before them. He knew that Salazar was there, but it was an automatic defence mechanism.

Serena shook her head negatively with a dark expression. “Actually, no. It hadn’t been dangerous at all at the time,” she muttered sullenly. “I don’t know what the people did to our poor forest for it to turn so...dark and uninviting. It was called the Enchanted Forest, in my time.”

Remus lifted a surprised eyebrow. “Really? I didn’t know that! It really is a wonder...” he trailed off as they finally saw the end of the shadowy forest.

“Are you sure you’ll be able to teleport us all at the same time? A Basilisk is a rather big animal to include in a wizarding transportation manner.” Harry asked while she asked Salazar to press the end of his tail on her back.

Serena shrugged, bid them to ready their wand just in case and, after holding each of their offered hand, she closed her eyes and let the familiar feeling of being whisked away fill her up.

Seconds later, there was no sign of them ever being there, except a huge slithering mark on the ground and a couple of footsteps.

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"Welcome to Little Hangleton." Serena deadpanned as they reappeared and let go of each other's hands.

Harry and Remus grimaced as they looked around: this part of the town was deserted and an aura of death permanently stained the atmosphere, making it ominous and bone-chilling. Amazing, really, because this result came only from one house; Riddle Manor, which they were currently standing in front of.

"Come on; let's not dawdle here out in the open. I know I said that Riddle Manor wasn't protected or warded, but Death Eaters might find it a nice place to walk around. *"Ssalazar, go underground until I grow in need of you."*

The immense snake seemed to nod, which Remus found fascinating, and short of disturbing.

"Ass you wissh, misstresss. Be careful." With that, Salazar slithered away silently and once it was out of sight enough from Riddle Mansion, he gave himself a swing and disappeared through the damp soil only to reappear if need be.

"Where's the Basilisk gone to?" Remus asked nervously, and Harry took him by the arm and followed Serena to the dirty door.

"She told Salazar to hide underground and show himself only if things become too tricky to handle."

Serena glanced around one last time and, muttering "Silentium" around the door and what was behind it, she pushed the door and stepped inside.

Remus mentally applauded her remarkable idea: the house was so old that the wood would have creaked under their weight.

“Follow me, the hidden passage is down the hall.” Serena said quietly, her eyes narrowed and calculating.

Harry took this time to look around; the house held little, if no furniture at all and spider’s webs decorated the place in every corner. He stifled a chuckle and Remus called him on it.

“Oh,” Harry replied with a smirk, “I was only thinking that it was a good thing that Ron didn’t come with us. He would have freaked just by seeing all the webs and spiders in this house.”

Remus smirked back. “Too true; Mister Weasley does have an unnatural fear of the little arachnids. Nobody came here for a long while, and either some people raided the place or Voldemort had them taken away to his new location.”

Harry grimaced. “I highly doubt that. Tom hated this place and his family, except for his mother who was a witch. It’s here that he’s killed for the first time, did you know? He killed his father first and the rest of his family followed quickly enough. Killed them all at the kitchen table, actually.”

Remus shuddered and shook his head. Serena suddenly shushed at them and stopped in front of the big painting of a snake that was as high as a normal human.

Remus narrowed his eyes at it and tried to take it off the wall, but with no success. “Just great! This painting has been heavily spelled to stay on the wall, probably why it’s still here after all these years. Like we needed another portrait like the one with Sirius’ mother in it,” Remus muttered gloomily.

“It must need a password to open,” Harry added as an afterthought.

Serena eyed the painting and came to only one conclusion. “This entire house, belonging to Salazar’s evil brother, must be entirely spelled to cooperate only with the descendants of the Slytherin bloodline. This means... *Open for me.*” She hissed, and to their surprise the painting slowly swung open to make place for a narrow but big enough passage for them all.

Harry hummed. "Not a bad idea for such a family of scum balls. No offence, Serena."

Serena's gaze was deadly. "None taken. Actually, they are total disgraces since they all came from my father's brother's bloodline. He destroyed Salazar's ideals and I will see to it that this part of the family gets destroyed!" she whispered ardently.

The painting closed behind them and, after taking a couple of steps, Serena suddenly stopped for no reason. "This is too easy."

Harry gave her a light tap on the back. "Don't say this! You'll jinx us—"

"Intruderssss It'sss been a long time ssince we've had company!"

Harry groaned and Remus gasped, taking a few steps backward. "Stay behind me, Remus!" Harry instructed while Serena marched confidently toward the obviously very dangerous and eager snakes that were coiling to attack or slithering in their direction menacingly.

There was about thirty of the impatient and riled up creatures which all belonged in the viper family. The one that first spoke was going to attack Serena when she stared at it with eerie bi-coloured eyes.

The red and black viper stopped and stared back, as if hypnotized.

"You will not hurt anyone here. You will obey me; the true heir of Ssalazar Sslytherin." She hissed with a deadly voice.

The vipers' heads all shot up, making Remus even more nervous, but his eyes widened as the snakes made way for them to pass safely. They did, albeit hurriedly, and Serena looked at them one last time. *"You are not without honour. If anyone triess to flee by thiss way, sstop them and do whatever you'd like to them. I will come back for you and sset you free ass ssoon ass thiss messs iss over."*

The first viper seemed to bow. *"Misssstresss Sslytherin iss noble, we will not forget thiss."* And then, they retreated back into the darkness behind them.

“Lumos!” Remus whispered when they found themselves walking in total darkness. It felt as if it was leading straight into the depths of Hell. They walked like this, with only the light from Remus’ wand, for nearly thirty minutes without ever coming across a nasty creature or Death Eaters or even Dementors, which Serena knew there was somewhere.

Finally they rounded a corner, and two options presented themselves to the trio: “So, is it left or right?” Harry asked with a foreboding feeling. Somehow, he knew that they would have to separate, and he wasn’t wrong.

Serena sighed and let her feelings guide her; it was the best thing to do right now. “Remus, you will have to take the right tunnel; it will lead you to Sirius Black. I can feel a major bad vibe coming from the left one, so you know what that means...” she trailed off with a humourless quirk of lips.

The Werewolf understood but kept eyeing Harry with deep concern. Harry grinned shortly as a pathetic attempt to reassure the older man but it only increased Remus’ worry. “Hey Remus, you knew I would have to do this sooner or later. Don’t worry too much; I still have Serena with me,” the dark haired boy said quietly.

Remus nodded, but as he was about to walk away he turned around swiftly and gathered his friend’s Godson into a hug. “You be careful, kid! You know how much you mean to me, and even Sirius!”

Harry hugged back as strongly and they suddenly departed without looking back. Serena walked beside Harry but couldn’t help to glance backward at the disappearing shadow of Remus. “He’ll be okay, Harry. Now just concentrate and reign in your magic until it’s needed. Remember what I taught you and know this: you’re not alone! Prophecy or not, I’ll be there to help you.”

Harry smiled softly at his girlfriend and wound an arm around her waist. “Thanks, I needed that.”

They instantly stiffened when, after another couple of minutes of walking, they heard someone talking, more like shouting and hissing angrily.

“Voldemort.” Harry simply whispered with loathing.

She nodded and they crouched when they came across a door that led to the main underground chamber. “They’re on the other side.”

Harry’s heart beat started to go way up and Serena narrowed her eyes at him. “Don’t break down on me!” she whispered harshly, “use that extra energy you have as a boost for your magic!”

Harry nodded and set his face in a determined expression.

“Right, I’ll break the door down to create some confusion. You’ll have to spot Voldemort as soon as you can; I’ll ‘occupy’ the Death Eaters.” Serena got up while Harry brandished his wand and put the strongest mental wall he could in order to resist any of Voldemort’s prying into his head.

They nodded at each other, and she lifted her hands. “PORTAM MOLIOR!”

The door rumbled and then was thrown off its hinges with such a force that it broke down on the other side of the main room on the wall, killing an unfortunate Death Eater in the process.

It was total chaos in the room when Voldemort finally locked his gaze on the Boy-Who-Lived. “Misster Potter! I would have never guessed you to have such cheek and show up directly in my lair!” Riddle hissed with his normal snake-like voice; he looked fuming as his eyes swept over the damage and finally landed on a silver haired girl.

“You must be the heir, the one everybody is talking about. The one who babble insanity about the great Salazar Slytherin!”

Serena sneered at the disfigured maniac and stood her ground as the dozen of Death Eaters started to surround them. “It is you who has been talking nonsense about Slytherin, you disgusting creature! You are not worth of being a descendant of Slytherin, but I will revise my judgment since you come from his evil brother’s line! I will put an end to you and this misunderstanding!”

The Death Eaters looked at each other and mumbled while Riddle looked totally outraged at the thought of not being a descendant from Salazar. "THIS IS LUDICROUS! STOP THEM!" he bellowed to the few dark servants present.

They started to move immediately and Serena was ready for them. "Praemunitio!" A shield erupted around her and she got a sudden idea.

"Excio Portam!" The door that was still trapping a dead Death Eater between itself and the wall hurled toward Serena at a great speed and she jumped aside as it knocked two other servants down.

She smirked; this was actually quite fun!

On their side, Harry and Riddle were having a staring contest. It seemed a plain and ordinary thing to do, but what the others didn't know is that they were both trying to get in the other's mind, and it was a draw for the moment with neither being able to overpower the other.

It started to get Voldemort pretty angry and he cut the contact by speaking in Parseltongue. Nagini showed up from behind her master and Harry couldn't get her to back down even by speaking to her; she was completely taken with Tom.

"SERPENTINUS!"

Both Voldemort and Harry turned to look at the silver haired girl who cried out the incantation while bellowing another to take care of a Death Eater in her way. Another Cobra appeared in front of Nagini and they both started to fight and hiss and spit insanities at each other.

Serena's plan worked, though: Nagini was no longer preoccupied about Harry, and when Voldemort gave her the evil eye she grinned at him cheekily to piss him off even more.

"I'll get you yet, Potter!" Voldemort rasped evilly while grinning sadistically.

Harry grinned back as darkly. "I don't think so, Tom. If you think you'll be using Sirius as a trump card you've got another thing coming! You see, my good friend Remus is rescuing Sirius at this very instant!" His green eyes gleamed as Tom roared his rage.

"You think the Werewolf will have it easy?! Ha! Potter how stupid you are! Did you really think that I would let Black unguarded, even if he is frozen?! You fool! Why do you think I have Death Eaters on my side???"

Harry's face drained of all color but he quickly regained his usual determined face. He quickly brandished his wand toward the room's opened exit. "EXPECTO PATRONUM!"

The light blinded everyone for a moment until the silver stag shot out of Harry's wand. "Find Remus and help him against the Dementors!" he instructed to the stag and after the shimmering animal gave one last look at its master the image of Prongs galloped towards Remus Lupin to fight against the ex-guardians of Azkaban.

Harry brought his attention back to his nemesis and started to fight Voldemort with every bit of magic he knew, which the Dark Lord answered with a few of his own personal resources.

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All the while, Remus was standing in front of a steel door and trying to get it to open, without success. Alohomora wouldn't work and he had tried every potential unlocking spells he knew, the ones that would have been able to destroy said door included.

But that was the least of his worries as he suddenly felt cold and depressed. "Oh no." It dawned on him; he wasn't alone anymore. "Oh no, no, no! Expecto Patronum!" he cried out and waved his wand in front of him.

The familiar light formed on the tip of his wand but even though it was very strong, unlike most wizards', his Patronus just wasn't like Harry's; a fully corporeal one.

The Dementors screeched and backed away at the light, but others just tried to pierce his defences by the sides. He just couldn't last long enough and cursed his rotten luck; he was right there! Sirius was right there behind this stupid door and he was trapped by Dementors right when he was about to see his dear friend again.

But as he was about to give up hope, the unpleasant and bone-chilling feeling went away and was replaced by utter contentment. He opened his eyes and was surprised to see Harry's Patronus in front of him, but no trace of the Dementors anywhere.

He let out the breath he'd been holding and sagged on the ground to regain his bearings. The stag looked at him closely and Remus smiled shakily at it. "I'm okay now, just give me some more minutes. I wish I had some chocolate with me! You should go back to Harry now."

The image of Prongs looked around one last time as if to be sure there weren't any more soul suckers before shimmering and vanishing out of the Werewolf's sight.

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Harry felt his Patronus disappear and smiled, knowing it had done its job correctly. He dodged a well placed Crucio and landed beside Serena, who had just finished her last Death Eater.

"Serena! Can you summon objects even if they're far away?" he asked quickly.

Serena nodded and her eyes sparkled when Harry allowed her a peek in his mind, not that she was unable to look if she wanted. She concentrated and opened her hands. An item dropped in her hands and she looked at it with pride before letting Harry borrow it for a second time.

The dark haired boy smirked at Tom's mortified face. "You know Tom, we both know that neither can kill the other with our wands. It would lead to the Priori Incantatem and that would be a problem in our plans to exterminate each other. I think I will use this sword a second time, this very sword that killed the previous Basilisk turned evil because of

you! Of course it's only a loan since it actually belongs to Serenity, but I think it's for a good cause, don't you?" Harry taunted Tom and advanced on the Dark Lord menacingly, brandishing the sword of Godric Gryffindor to scare him some more.

Voldemort growled and shouted the killing curse at Harry, who simply avoided it instead of letting the connection spell hit them both. Harry yelled in fury as he ran as fast as he could toward Voldemort and, before the Dark Lord could comprehend what was happening, he found himself pierced in the heart by the legendary sword. His breath caught in his throat and he fell to the ground, as limp as a sheet of paper.

Harry retrieved the sword from his enemy's heart and panted, turning his back at the corpse that would no longer destroy his life.

"Foolissh boy!"

Harry's eyes widened in terror as the familiar voice resounded in the room. He turned around swiftly as smoke formed above the body of Voldemort, and became a ghost like appearance of the Dark Lord.

"You may be able to destroy my body, but my soul is stronger than that! I will find another body to take over and then the circle will begin again!" The image laughed maniacally as this time Harry Potter could do nothing against him.

Serena rolled her eyes. "He's completely round the bend, that one."

Then, her face became unyielding as she opened her mouth before the ghost-like appearance could float away. *"Come to me, Sslazar!"*

The ground started to shake and soon Salazar emerged from the damp soil, making the dirt fly around in every direction. *"Ssalazar! Open your eyess and kill thiss apparition! I want thiss ssoul desstroyed!"*

The ghost's mouth was wide opened at seeing another Basilisk, but the surprise turned into terror when the huge snake's glare fell upon him. The ghost screamed and then, little by little, started to shimmer out of existence, as if it was a fire being put out.

When nothing remained, Harry and Serena allowed themselves to relax. "Come on Harry. We still have to find Remus and your Godfather." Serena finally said, happy that this whole ordeal was over.

"Yeah, I don't plan on staying here for too long." Harry replied, and they both started to walk in the direction Remus had taken, with Salazar in tow.

They found Remus sitting on the ground in front a door he obviously hadn't been able to break down. "Remus!" Harry called happily, and the Werewolf's head snapped up.

"Harry! You're okay!" He swiftly got up and hugged the younger boy.

"It's over Remus! It's finally over!" Harry laughed happily. Tears were falling from his eyes and he didn't even know why.

Remus' eyes widened in hope and he gazed at Serena, who nodded in confirmation. The man whooped in joy and laughed with them; they felt as if a weight had suddenly lifted from their shoulders. "Merlin how I had waited this day! Lily! James! Do you hear? Voldemort is finally dead!" he spoke while lifting his head heavenward.

Harry smiled softly at his friend and hugged back, happy that his parents' deaths were finally avenged.

Serena smiled at them and asked Salazar if he could try to tear the door down. The Basilisk did so with no problem with only a small head butt, careful with his strength in case Sirius stood directly behind the door.

Luckily, he hadn't been placed there, but in the far corner of the cell, and apparently still petrified, which Serena remedied to pretty quickly with the help of her special knowledge.

Sirius groaned and that very sound made Remus and Harry laugh in joy.

"Uh? What? Where are we guys? What's happening?"

Remus laughed again and helped Sirius on his feet. Apparently, the dog Animagus was merely shaken up but had no recollection of what had happened since Bellatrix had stupefied him.

“Sirius! You won’t believe what happened-” Harry started while hugging his Godfather as if the man was going to vanish, but Serena interrupted them. “Guys, not that I want to cut that touching reunion short but there’s no way in Hell I wanna stay here any longer.”

“Of course!” Harry exclaimed while Remus and he supported a still shaken Sirius and touched Serena’s arm to teleport.

Something moved behind the girl and Sirius’ eyes doubled in size as they disappeared from the cursed Mansion.

“IS THAT A BLOODY BASILISK?!?!?” was the only holler of shock that echoed in the now completely empty Riddle house.

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Chapter 25: Wrath

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They reappeared at the borders of Hogwarts' wards in the end of the afternoon. "*Ssalazar come with usss.*" Serena instructed to her familiar.

They were too far away from the hidden passageway and frankly, the group wanted to get back to the castle as quickly as possible. If Salazar had been older and bigger they would have been able to mount the Basilisk but he was still a little too small to be able to fully support four people onto its back, two of them being grown men.

A confused and very much weakened Sirius, who had abandoned the idea of asking who the girl was or why there was a Basilisk with them, was being held by Remus and Harry, who refused to let him go.

Harry was also very tired and emotionally, as well as mentally, exhausted; the high he had felt during the battle was now making him pay for it and yet the presence of Sirius made him continue to put one foot in front of the other.

Serena was walking in front of them with Salazar by her side and with good reason: as soon as they arrived in front of the castle's gates they were surrounded by newspaper reporters. Before they could even ask their first question, though, Salazar, with the signal of his mistress, had already advanced and coiled around Serena and her friends protectively. "*You sshall not passs! Be gone, you annoying humans!*"

Although the reporters didn't understand Parseltongue, they sure backed away when they heard the Basilisk hiss dangerously low and place itself in an attacking position.

They snapped out of it when they remembered in front of what creature they were standing; a very dark and mortally dangerous creature. The reporters quickly stepped back and the huge snake uncoiled from around its protégés, leaving them enough place to walk to Hogwarts.

One of them narrowed his eyes as he gazed at a fairly familiar mop of long dark hair and he gasped in horror. "That's Sirius Black!!!"

Exclamations of shock, fear and anger cut through the air and they once again started to crowd around the Boy-Who-Lived, wands drawn out and at the ready to defend the younger boy.

Harry scowled at their ignorance and stupidity, as well as Remus. Sirius felt the unmistakable urge to transform into his Animagus form and run away but as it was still a secret he simply tightened his hold on the two holding him faithfully.

Salazar was about to strike, making the reporters shriek, but Serena stopped her pet with a hiss. *"Ssalazar, leave them alone. I don't really care to sssee any more deathss for today. I will deal with them persssoonally."*

The Basilisk nodded and let her pass while it slithered over Harry and the other men. The reporters looked at the silver haired girl with a bit of fear and apprehension; news had traveled fast and they knew who she was. They were here especially to interview her, but by the look on her face she wasn't going to answer any of their questions any time soon.

Her bi-colored eyes narrowed and for a second they were sure the orbs had turned icy silver, but they deemed this a trick of the light. They backed away and cried out in fear as she lifted one arm in a wiping motion, thinking that she was either going to kill them or make them land in St-Mungo's.

"Tenebrae Nebulosus!"

As soon as the spell left her lips a thick fog appeared out of nowhere and encircled them, trapping them inside as they lost all visual contact with the heiress. They shouted and bumped into each other, imploring her to lift the spell, but their pleas fell on deaf ears as the girl had already joined the group.

It was odd to see the thick fog forming a tight circle around them and not anywhere else on the grounds. Harry's lips quirked up when he

heard the imploring shouts. "You're wicked, you know that?" he asked playfully.

Serena smirked back. "They had it coming."

In order to avoid any further confrontations, it was Salazar who pushed the great doors open and slither in first. It was half chaos in the school; students were talking all at the same time and running around, and the teachers weren't better themselves. They had been looking for Harry or at least Remus, but when they entered the entrance hall of the castle became deathly still and silent.

Nobody moved an inch as they painfully or tiredly made their way in, and Minerva was about to yell at Harry to know where they had been when she spotted the third party. "Sirius Black?" she whispered, her face going from angry red to ghostly white in mere seconds.

Snape stared in pure shock. "How? You fell, you- you died!"

The students shrieked and ran behind the teachers as the infamous Sirius Black let out a raspy chuckle. "Snape. What? Aren't you happy to see me?" he mocked.

Severus scowled but Albus stopped the Potions Master before an all out war could start. "Sirius my boy, this truly is a surprise. What happened? We really all thought you were dead."

Black shrugged. "I don't know what really happened. One moment I was hit with a stunner by Bellatrix and the next I'm being awakened and rescued from wherever I was held captive. I lost track of time, really."

Harry glared at the Headmaster from his place beside his Godfather. "He never died! I knew he couldn't die like that, not Sirius! You never believed me and you lost hope!"

At this, Remus lowered his head but Sirius squeezed his hand slightly, showing that he wasn't angry with Remus.

Harry continued; "Thanks to Serena we found out where he was being held, and guess what? He was at Riddle Mansion."

The teachers' eyes widened in disbelief and Mad-Eye, who was with them, took a step toward them, ignoring the hissing Basilisk. "Impossible! Riddle Mansion has been searched from top to bottom but nothing showed of people having been there for a long time! The damn Manor wasn't even warded!" he finished gruffly.

Harry sneered. "Well you didn't search enough to find the secret passageway!"

Serena interrupted Harry calmly, but there was an ironic sense of humor in her voice. "Calm down, Harry. You know they wouldn't have been able to get in anyway; none of them were Parselmouths. Speaking of which, I'll have to go back there and free the snakes guarding the entrance, as I promised them."

Mad-Eye exploded in anger. "ARE YOU INSANE, GIRL?! You can't go back there alone! You just freed Black -how you all did is a mystery to me in the first place- and the Dark Lord must be livid raging mad! You all probably, by this stupid rescue attempt, brought his rage upon Hogwarts! Do you have any idea of what you've done?!" Moody panted as his anger subdued.

The students didn't really understand what was going on, except that the murderer Sirius Black was standing right in front of them, beside the Boy-Who-Lived, no less, and that Dumbledore wasn't doing anything about it...That, and the Dark Lord was likely going to attack Hogwarts soon.

Ron and Hermione shivered at the thought even though they were happy to see Sirius again. But they all gasped and gaped as first Serena, and then the others behind her, started to chuckle, and then laugh out loud as if laughing at some kind of cruel joke the others didn't understand.

Albus shook himself from his stupor, believing that they were either completely mad or simply uncaring of their fate. The stupor made way for anger, and the students now backed away from the Headmaster when he narrowed his eyes and magic started to be felt around him, making him look more authoritative and robust; the reason why He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named feared him so much.

“THIS IS NO LAUGHING MATTER!” he exclaimed with his powerful voice.

They stopped laughing but the smirks still stayed on their faces. “Oh, Headmaster, I don’t think Voldemort” people winced at the name “will be coming any time soon,” Harry said smoothly. “Especially after what we did to him.”

The teachers’ mouths opened and closed without any sound. Snape was able to gain his voice back and he asked uncertainly: “What did you do to him?”

Harry smirked even more and his eyes darkened. “Oh, I enjoyed it immensely. The sound of his flesh tearing was very gratifying.”

Everybody stood at a standstill, not really hearing what he said, or either not wanting to understand; they concentrated more on Serena, who produced a sword and brought it to eye level. She wasn’t looking at the sword in general but more on the red drops of liquid smeared all over the sharp blade.

“You-what?”

Harry prided himself for surprising the Headmaster and the Potions Master; those times were so rare.

“What’s going on, Severus? Didn’t you feel it?” Remus asked with a raised eyebrow.

Snape babbled: “W-what? F-feel what?”

Remus shook his head and Harry answered for the Werewolf. “When he died, didn’t you feel anything?”

Snape seemed to think about it for a second. “I did feel a twinge a while ago but I thought nothing of it-” right then, the dark eyes widened when Severus’ brain completely grasped what he previously heard...as well as everybody else present.

“Dead?” The Potions Master whispered, but that whisper cut the air like a knife through butter.

The significance of this revelation took some time for them to find their breaths. "That's. Completely. Unimaginable," Moody grunted out, but Harry could still see a thin sheet of sweat on the ex-auror's brow.

Harry shrugged. "It took less time than I thought and it was indeed pretty hard, especially when you think that he had a couple more years of experience than me. But Serena's training helped me greatly; while he tried to get me with his wand, which he could not do because of the Priori Incantatem, I bombarded him with spells that she taught me. Making the sword of Godric appear was a piece of cake for her when I asked and he was too paralyzed to do anything else but let himself be pierced with the sword. Serena took care of the Death Eaters while I battled Tom and Remus found Sirius' cell. I had to use my Patronus to help Remus because Dementors were guarding the cell and fortunately he hasn't got his soul sucked out of him. But I thought he would really come back again if it hadn't been for you, Serena!" The green eyed boy said while looking at the girl.

The teachers and students looked at each other with fear. "Come back?" Ron squeaked out nervously.

Harry nodded. "Yeah, AFTER I killed him, no less. His soul really was persistent; he really scared me shitless when he came back in some kind of ghostly soul form but Serena had the great idea to call Salazar and use the death glare, literally, on him. Tom never saw this coming, another Basilisk! Nagini is also gone: killed by a conjured snake of Serena's. I'm sure there are many more Death Eaters and Dementors roaming the lands but their boss is dead; they'll be easy to track and capture or kill, whatever you like best."

Dumbledore wanted to sit down to let the information sink in but he frowned at a thought. "Wait. She also helped you defeat Voldemort? But the Prophecy clearly said that you were the only one destined to do it."

The students whispered amongst themselves with curiosity: what was the Prophecy Dumbledore was talking about?

Harry, surprisingly, had the answer to that question. "The power the Dark Lord knows not. Voldemort didn't know about Serena's identity

and power. I indeed killed him, at least in the physical plane of existence, and she killed him with the help of Salazar.”

Harry paused and sighed. “Can I just go to the Hospital Wing with the others? We’re tired beyond reason and we just want to be left in peace.”

Harry and Remus started to haul a half-conscious Sirius and people quickly stepped backward to let them pass.

That is, until a couple of Aurors, not part of the Order, bravely stepped in front of them. “We will send Aurors in the Riddle Mansion to check up on the facts, but we cannot let you pass with Sirius Black! He is a murderer, Potter! He murdered Pettigrew and twelve other muggles! He was sentenced to the Dementors kiss so he must be imprisoned and receive a new sentence, since the Dementors are no longer in use!”

Foolish Aurors.

Harry sneered when they stepped menacingly toward his Godfather and Remus growled low in his throat.

“Keep to yourself, Lupin, or we will have to arrest you too! We don’t need a brainless Werewolf attacking us!” they snapped at the golden haired man.

Harry had his wand pointed at them in an instant. Serena went to Sirius and helped Remus support him while her boyfriend advanced in the Aurors’ direction.

Salazar stayed beside his mistress, eyes still closed, but he could feel the tension in the air, as well as Harry’s rage.

“You. Leave. My. Godfather. **ALONE!**” he pressed between his teeth.

The Aurors took a cautious step back, eyeing the boy with mistrust; they had to be careful because if Potter had really killed the Dark lord, he could also be dangerous for them. “Now you listen here, Potter-”

Now that the valve was opened, Harry let out all his anger and pain. "NO! **YOU** LISTEN TO **ME**! I've got enough of your shit!" Harry ignored the outraged gasps behind him in favor of shouting some more at the now very wide eyed Aurors.

"Sirius never got a decent trial! The previous Minister never gave him one! My Godfather is a good man! He never killed anybody, and most certainly not my parents, whom he thought of as family! Heck! If you want to throw him into prison because he supposedly killed, which you have no proof of, you'll just have to take me too!"

Everybody gasped as Harry put his wand back in his pocket and brought his wrists together in front of the Aurors. "Go on! Take me too! I murdered somebody, didn't I? I killed Voldemort and I enjoyed it! GO ON!"

The Aurors looked indecisive but one of them scowled and slapped Harry's hands away. "Don't be daft, Potter! Everybody is on your side and killing Voldemort was your job! Black, on the other side, is not so innocent! He betrayed your parents, you dim-witted boy!" He walked confidently in Sirius' direction, wand poised for attack.

Remus looked around wildly in fear and clutched Sirius to him. Serena glared and was about to spell the Auror away when Harry let all his fury rage out of him, not caring if he fell unconscious because of it. "**STAY AWAY FROM MY GODFATHEEEEEER!!!!!!!!!!!!!!**" he roared ear-shatteringly, letting his uncontrolled talent do the rest.

The Aurors were thrown back by a gigantic wave of magic and they landed outside the castle, the doors still being opened. The stone walls of Hogwarts even shook with the blast.

They landed with sickening thuds but they painfully succeeded to get up. They looked at Harry with venomous eyes. "This ain't over yet, Potter!"

Harry snarled as they stiffly turned around and limped out of Hogwarts' wards to Apparate away, shouting at the reporters to leave them alone. Everyone thought this as being somewhat funny, but as the students watched the Aurors limp away painfully Serena was already halfway to her boyfriend.

Once the thrill was over, though, Harry regretted his actions as the world around him spun unbearably fast, as if something rushed out of him; something that was an important part of him. His eyes became hazy and closed when he fell backwards in a dead faint.

The students shrieked and the teachers gasped. Remus and Sirius cried out Harry's name but fortunately Serena was there to catch him before he hit the ground.

"Harry?" She checked his vitals and her eyes became serious.

"His pulse is erratic. It's magical exhaustion: he used too much magic in a short amount of time. Using my kind of spells didn't help either. They're more raw and powerful, but also harder to master and control. Since he's very powerful he was able to use them quite rapidly, but still not at their most powerful extent. It drained him during his fight with Voldemort and it was only a matter of time before it got to his health. That last blast triggered the reaction."

She looked at Madam Pomfrey, who startled under such a stare. "You! You're the school's nurse, aren't you? We have to go to the infirmary. Take care Remus and Sirius first while I check Harry up. This time I won't be able to do much. Normally I can heal wounds, but not magical exhaustion. I cannot give Harry back his magic because it is unique to him only. He'll have to rest. I forbid him to do any form of magic until full recovery. I will not like this when he wakes up but I will take care of everything that I am sure will come up; like the return of those Aurors."

She let Pomfrey levitate Harry since Remus had his arms full and followed them to the infirmary while the teachers ordered the students, a protesting Ron and Hermione included, to go directly to their dormitories and stay there until further notice.

The teachers who didn't know Sirius kept a vigilant and reprimanding eye on the ex-prisoner but didn't dare act against Dumbledore's will. Everyone who wasn't concerned with the group was shooed away from the Infirmary and when they started to retaliate vividly Serena hissed for Salazar to simply push them away, which he didn't really have to do since no one wanted that creature to touch them.

The door closed magically and the only ones in the room were the members of the Order outside the school, Albus, Severus, Minerva and the tired 'heroes' who were currently getting a complete check-up by Poppy.

Remus let himself be healed without trouble, but Sirius, lying down on a bed, protested weakly and groaned for Poppy to leave him alone. The nurse scowled when the animagus flung his arms up to push her away and she threatened him with her wand. "Stop being so childish, Sirius Black! You're acting like a real macho! You've been petrified for a long time from what I've heard so you WILL STAY PUT or else I'll stun you again!"

The threats made Sirius calm down and pout darkly, which made Remus try to hide a weak chuckle with a cough, earning himself a glare from his friend.

Serena sat on Harry's appointed bed, a little farther away from the others. She stroked his hair gently and with care she put a cool piece of cloth on his feverish brow. "You'll be alright," she whispered tenderly, "I'll make sure Sirius stays here while you're recuperating."

She bent down and, ignoring the not so subtle stares she was receiving, kissed him on the corner of his mouth. Everyone averted her gaze when she looked at them, except for Remus who looked at her with a soft, albeit tired, smile. "You love him very much, don't you?" he asked softly.

She gave him the same smile and nodded while looking back at her love and continuing to stroke his hair. "Yes. Not only because he is the one who awoke me, but also because he is the first human aside from my fathers with whom I talked to. He didn't treat me as a weapon or fear me; he saw me as I am and didn't push me into anything I didn't want. He understands me as I understand him. Our fears, our pains, our hearts are connected; at least that's what I feel."

She got up when Poppy approached the bed and let the MediWitch do her job. Harry was completely surrounded by special wards as soon as Poppy finished with him, wards that would alert the teachers if Harry's condition worsened or if he woke up sometime in the night.

Poppy had made him drink a ton of Severus' potions, some of them being healing and restorative draughts. Since Poppy considered every wounded or tired people like a patient with no care of he or she being poor or rich, weak or powerful beyond imagination, she didn't have any problems to force the heiress into the bed adjacent to Harry's.

Serena didn't protest since she wanted to stay near the dark haired boy but she didn't accept any potions, no matter how much Poppy insisted.

"I really don't need all these potions. The magic I used was very natural and easy for me to handle whereas Harry used it when all he ever did was your kind of magic. If I indeed feel the need to take a potion I will make it myself. After all, father Salazar's potions were more potent than anything you have here and I doubt your potions will do much."

Severus' ears just got bigger when he heard this, although he scowled at her. "What? Aren't my potions good enough for you? I AM a Potions Master, after all!"

Serena gave him a sorry look. "I didn't mean to insult you and I'm sure you're a very good master of it, but father Salazar invented many more potions than you, of that I am sure. His many tomes are still in his vault, intact and forgotten from Time. He always liked a good challenge and sometimes concocted potions as new try-outs to cure whatever disease or curse there was in the world. Pity nobody ever knew he was the one to make them and many of those potions books were never even seen by the public because he was the one who wrote them in the first place."

When Serena finished, the others' eyes lit with a humorous light as Severus almost jumped from one foot to another in overexcitement. "Potions books from the Master Slytherin himself?!"

Serena raised an eyebrow from the silent question. Obviously, Snape really wanted to take a look at them. "I'll think about it," she merely replied, making Severus' wide eyes become a little less playful. He would have to earn the privilege and she wasn't about to give him her

father's books just like that. After all, the new discoveries hidden in them belonged to Salazar himself and not anyone else.

Madam Pomfrey soon shooed the rest of the people out and, with one last motherly smile and good nights, she closed the door behind her to get some rest herself; it was pretty late, judging from the half-moon hanging high in the night sky.

A comfortable silence stretched in the room but soon Remus fidgeted from his bed beside a sleeping Sirius. "Um...Miss uh...Gryffindor-Slytherin?" Remus started hesitantly.

Serena looked in his direction with half-closed eyes. "My name is Serenity but you can call me Serena, Mr. Lupin. What ails you?"

Remus relaxed and chuckled lightly. "And you can call me Remus. Mister Lupin makes me sound so old, and I'm sure Sirius will like it if you call him by his name when he wakes up. Anyway, I really wanted to thank you for keeping an eye on Harry back at Riddle Mansion. And...and not being scared of what I am and accepting me as I am. Maybe it will take some time to adjust and get used to your presence but I would like it very much if you could stay with Harry, Sirius and I once everything clears away; if things go as they should in Sirius' case... Or did you want to stay in Hogwarts since you're the legitimate heir?"

Serena shook her head in the darkness, knowing that Remus could see a little better than her in the dark. "Why should I be scared of you? You're a very nice man, Remus, and I'm certain Sirius is too since Harry seems to care for him so much. As for my plans for the future, it's certain that I won't cut myself from Hogwarts, but I think I'll go back to my fathers' Mansions where I spent my childhood. You're all most welcomed if you want to stay with me!" she offered tentatively, and Remus' eyes lit up.

"Really? That would be so nice! I don't think Sirius will ever want to go back to his family's house and Godric's Hollow, that's the name of Harry's family's Mansion, has been destroyed in the first war against Voldemort. I didn't know that Slytherin and Gryffindor's Mansions still existed..."

Serena chuckled. "They're protected by the most powerful wards ever and activated fully when my fathers died; they became completely invisible and implottable and people probably forgot where they were situated with time. They're not so far from one another so it won't be a trouble to lift a part of the protective spells."

Silence reigned again but this time Remus was satisfied and slowly fell asleep. Serena listened to the silence and smiled before she, too, fell into a deep slumber.

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Chapter 26: Return to the origins

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Serena and Remus were awakened pretty quickly the next morning and also pretty rudely as a bunch of aurors all but forced their way in the infirmary. Poppy was immediately after them and threatening them very seriously that if they so much tried to touch her patients she would hex them into oblivion.

“Dumbledore, you will calm the ardor of your staff members or else we will do it for you!” Auror Shacklebolt said angrily as he tried to pry Madam Pomfrey off of him.

The old headmaster frowned but told the nurse to stay back nonetheless so he could deal with this himself. Since classes had been canceled until all this mess was sorted, all the teachers were present and trying to retaliate against the ministry emissaries.

Serena glowered at the chaos they created and when she spotted a still sedated Sirius beginning to frown and groan in his sleep it was the last straw. “Can I do something for you gentlemen? Because if you’re only here to disrupt the peace in this room I will kindly ask you to leave. If you are unwilling to cooperate I’m sure that Salazar will make himself the pleasure to escort you out of MY castle.”

Everyone stopped talking as she glared at them from her place in the infirmary bed. The aurors calmed down even if some of them continued to eye Sirius suspiciously. The fear of being in the presence of the Basilisk, though, stifled their enthusiasm.

“Listen, we don’t want to cause a commotion but we need to be sure that the Dark Lord has indeed been killed definitively or not and until proven otherwise we will at least have to keep Black under tight surveillance,” Shacklebolt dedicated himself to speak to her since the others found it wise to keep their mouth shut.

Remus growled and jumped out of his bed only to stop beside Sirius in a protective manner. “You’re not touching him! The man’s under bloody sedation because he’s been kept under petrification for too

long, for Merlin's sake! Are you afraid he'll jump on you when you're not looking!"

The aurors looked at the Werewolf disapprovingly but Serena's warning glare stopped them from talking, and in consequence digging their graves even deeper.

"You will leave Sirius Black alone. I am ready to go back to Riddle Mansion with you all and when the proofs will all be delivered you will allow the Daily Prophet to write all of the Death Eaters' names, including those who might have survived elsewhere; I'm sure the headmaster has a list of names somewhere. And I will look into the matter of electing for a new COMPETENT minister who will not turn to the evil side as soon as someone threatens him or his position. I will also look into the Black case and I will reinstall ALL of Sirius' rights and privileges, as well as his wand. He's been wrongly imprisoned and I WILL expect a letter of excuses published in the Daily Prophet and claiming that he is indeed innocent."

The aurors looked outraged. "That's complete bull! You don't have any power over the ministry! You don't have anything to do with the new election, and no right whatsoever to enter the ministry and ask for the file of Sirius Black!"

The girl smirked darkly. "Then Harry and his friends will divulge the dirty secrets along with the incompetence of the people of the Ministry of Magic and you will all be replaced to make way for a younger and more righteous generation of leaders."

Their eyes widened and they stuttered. "W-wait! We can certainly arrange something! We'll go to the Riddle Mansion and if we find enough proof we will drop all charges off Sirius Black and do as you asked!"

The teachers in the room looked at each other and smirked as the heiress of Gryffindor and Slytherin toyed with the flustered Aurors.

They quickly made all the necessary agreements and, after saying goodbye to Remus and kissing a sleeping Harry on the cheek, she bade them to touch her arm and they vanished without the usual loud popping sound of Apparition.

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To say the Aurors were surprised when Serenity hissed to the great painting of the snake near the kitchen was an understatement, and even more so when it actually opened.

Before they could walk in, however, Serena held her arm up to them from walking into the death trap. "Wait. I need to do something first. Stay here for a minute and DON'T MOVE."

With one last warning glance she entered the passageway, leaving a couple of annoyed Aurors.

"I don't see why we can't enter damnit!" one of them muttered under his breath while the others nodded their agreement. They weren't prepared to see at least fifty snakes of all sorts slither out the passageway and hissing at them as they glided away and out of the house.

They yelped and readied their wand, but lowered them immediately after when they remembered Serena's warning. If they attacked the snakes now the creatures would retaliate and bite them to death.

"You can come now. There aren't any snakes left."

The aurors looked at each other with uncertainty but walked in the tunnel nonetheless. The smell inside was old and murky but tolerable enough for a short amount of time. The walk was long and silent, with the silver haired girl leading the way confidently. She first showed them the cell where Sirius had been held prisoner; the atmosphere was still glacial, remnants of the passage of many Dementors. Luckily for them the hidden underground tunnel was entirely deserted.

Serena then led them to the main chamber and the aurors nearly gagged at the strong scent of blood and decay. The carnage was evident, the cold bodies laid out in the same untouched positions, as well as Nagini's spoils and Tom Marvolo Riddle's deformed, cloak clad body.

The men accompanying Serena shuddered in both awe and disgust at the sight and they started to "catalog" the names of the dead

people. They were appalled to find out so many men from the ministry and of important stature and bloodline.

“That’s all so great and such –I’m not touching the Dark Lord’s body, by the way- but that doesn’t show me that Sirius Black is innocent,” Kingsley Shacklebolt said with a frown.

Serena gazed around her and walked toward the nearly broken door lying on the stone floor and used levitation on it to toss it aside. “Hey! Will he help?”

The wizards approached and gasped at the mangled body of another Death Eater (the dark mark being evident on the arm), and shiny metal hand.

“Impossible! He was killed sixteen years ago! Black killed him and there was nothing else found of him but a finger!” they all exclaimed in pure shock.

Serena kneeled down and showed them the good hand made of skin. “You mean the missing finger of this hand? This man is...was Peter Pettigrew, the true Secret Keeper and betrayer of the Potters. Shocking isn’t it?” she mocked them while glaring.

They didn’t quite know what to say but they sure acted. The bodies were all gathered and the aurors created a Portkey. “You can be sure that will get to the bottom of this. Pettigrew’s body will be tested to be certain that it is indeed him and as soon as the results come out you will be the first to know. This will create one hell of an uproar in the Wizarding World,” Shacklebolt muttered under his breath. “We’ll have to find all the remaining Death Eaters and Dementors. I feel we won’t be sleeping for a while.”

They disappeared as they touched the Portkey, leaving the heiress behind.

Serena vanished not too long afterwards only to reappear in the infirmary, shocking the hell out of poor Madam Pomfrey who was tending to Sirius.

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3 days later

The Wizarding World was still in the dark, except for a few selected people. School had been canceled undeterminably so the students were free to do what they wished in the castle and Hogsmeade.

They didn't understand, though, why the Infirmary was strictly off-limits to everyone. Rumors were spreading but none of them were confirmed.

Ronald Weasley and Hermione Granger had gone there once or twice but even they had difficulty to persuade the Headmaster.

It was now pretty early in the morning and one could see a silver haired girl sitting on the bed of a sleeping black haired boy, who was no longer in a comatose state.

Sirius Black, who had awakened the day before and was treated by Pomfrey and Serena, was talking quietly to one Remus J. Lupin not too far from Harry's bed. Sirius was getting restless again from being cooped up inside but at least Harry was with him this time.

He had been drilled about Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin but was still gawking at the girl once in a while. It would take some time to get used to the fact that she had been created by Salazar and Godric about a thousand years ago. But he liked the girl already and Serena liked Sirius, so things were clearly looking up.

Suddenly there was a sharp tap in one of the room's windows and Serena opened it to let the Barn Owl in. It hooted in thanks and presented its clawed paw with a rolled paper tightly attached to it.

Albus and his fellow teachers chose this very moment to enter the Infirmary and they blinked at the girl who was now unrolling what looked like a very early delivered edition of the Daily Prophet. Sirius and Remus hovered curiously over her shoulder until she squealed in joy uncharacteristically.

In his bed Harry groaned, awakened by the sudden exclamation of happiness. Serena ignored everyone altogether and ran to him, showing him the paper. The tired boy squinted his eyes but couldn't

read anything without his glasses. Serena helped him sit and all but tossed him his glasses with an impatient whine.

Harry took too long to put his glasses on so she turned the newspaper toward the second person it included. It took Sirius five seconds to read and re-read the title and he sat heavily on Harry's bed with wide and tearful eyes.

Harry and Remus immediately understood what the paper was about and the boy's own green eyes started to tear-up. The teen gathered Serena, Sirius and Remus in a big group hug while he let out some "Finally! Finally it's over!" phrases and shaky laughs.

Serena smiled, closed her eyes and said out loud: "We will come back."

Before the teachers and Dumbledore could ask what she was talking about or interfere, the quartet vanished right before their eyes, leaving them crying out in surprise in the Infirmary.

Albus Dumbledore walked slowly toward the fallen newspaper and retrieved it.

The Dark Lord is DEAD! Sirius Black is acquitted after the results on Peter Pettigrew's body were received! Harry Potter and heiress Serenity Gryffindor-Slytherin: the heroes of the Wizarding World!

More info in pages two to twenty. Exclusive: the story behind the heiress of Hogwarts!

Severus Snape walked toward Albus with a frown. "What was that all about! Where have they gone to?"

Albus turned in the direction of the other curious teachers and grinned peacefully. "A new era had begun. It is as she has said: they will be back. Gryffindor and Slytherin Mansion will be visible to the common eyes once more. Peace, is what the future now offers us."

Everyone smiled.

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Hi guys! I hope you liked the ending! Wah! Last chapter! It's so sad!
But at the same time good that it finally ends!

I hope to see you in my other story entitled "The world Without Me".

I love ya all!

REVIEW!

Eternal Cosmos